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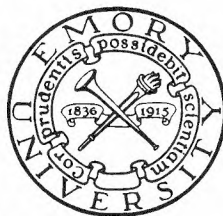
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A FRISKY MATRON

BY
PERCY LYSLE

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL

1897

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A FRISKY MATRON



CHAPTER I.

PARIS.

‘ KHUB shahr !’ (splendid city), said Yussuff Khan, as he gazed from the window of a railway carriage of the Rapide on beautiful Paris, into which the Marseilles train rapidly hurried him. A few more minutes and the engine pulled up with a scrunch. Yussuff alighted with an easy elegance, combined with a *soupçon* of Oriental indolence, such as characterizes the movements of a trained athlete. He looked round with the air of one accustomed to being served. An unmistakable Khitmeghar promptly made his way from a second class carriage, accompanied by two brawny sons of Anak, darker in complexion than is usual among Hindoos. A large pile of luggage was soon collected and deposited in the cloak-room. Yussuff called his servant on one side, and desired him to have a good breakfast with his two fellow-servants in the *buffet*,

and await his return at three o'clock, it being then half-past twelve.

Yussuff then left the terminus, and was quickly driven in a north-westerly direction. The instincts developed by a journey of 800 kilomètres led him irresistibly towards the Café de la Paix *viâ* the Turkish baths in the Rue Castiglione. A final cold plunge, with no danger of crocodiles, gave a new zest to the resources of civilization. Yussuff issued from the Saracenic portals a new and very distinguished-looking man, a fact borne witness to by many bright eyes as he passed. It is wonderful how vague are the ideas of Europeans about the inhabitants of Hindoostan. India contains many more distinct races than Europe does, and the difference between some of them is as great as that between a man of Kent and a Laplander. Yussuff was tall, very tall and slender, and graceful in his movements. His lineaments were of a pure Caucasian type, and the high caste Indian style of features may be best described by stating that it resembles the most refined class of Norman beauty. The nose slightly aquiline and delicately chiselled, short upper lip, well-formed chin, black velvety eyes, silky wavy hair, white and perfectly-formed teeth, with the small hands and feet characteristic of the Kohistanee, completed the *ensemble* of a strikingly handsome man. Only his colour was too dark. Two shades lighter and he might have been a Spaniard. He was a very dark brown, yet his complexion seemed

transparent and as smooth as brown satin. The hot blood of the tropics mantled in his cheeks, while his eyes flashed at times in a way suggestive of an unlimited reserve of potential energy.

Yussuff strode along with an assured air. He held in his hand a map of the quarter, and referred once or twice to a small compass attached to his watch-chain. It was evident that his course had been the subject of previous study, and he had all the appearance of a man accustomed to master topography rapidly. He soon found himself comfortably seated before a breakfast such as can only be had in one of the most noted Paris restaurants.

Yussuff leaned back in his chair and looked around with a vast contentment. After many hardships, there is a sense of intense physical comfort in luxurious surroundings. While he gave himself up to thinking how pleasant this sort of life was, a very long man stalked rather than walked towards the table at which he sat. A waiter came forward with *empressement* and placed a chair, with a manner suggesting that the new-comer was an *habitué* being assigned his accustomed place. The stranger sat down, bowing stiffly and saying, '*Bonjour, monsieur,*' with an unmistakable foreign accent.

'*Bonjour, monsieur,*' said Yussuff; and then, breaking into English: 'I speak not the French well, but I understand a little; *il faut l'usage, il faut l'habitude.*'

‘ Ah, you belong to the dark lands of the English. Wall, stranger, I guess that’s a wide country to hail from. Next to the United States, I acknowledge that Greater Britain is large, pretty large. Ever been in the States ?’

‘ No,’ said Yussuff; ‘ but I have a great wish to see that mighty country. I have read much about it : its mountains, its Mississippi, its canyons——’

‘ Three thousand feet deep,’ said the stranger.

‘ Its oil——’

‘ In floods like its Mississippi,’ said the stranger.

‘ Its eloquence——’

‘ Slippery as its oil and as endless.’

‘ Its explosions——’

‘ We blow up higher than any other people.’

‘ Its frauds——’

‘ Our frauds, particularly our political frauds, are the greatest on the face of the earth.’

‘ And your bankruptcies.’

‘ When we bust, sir, we bust as no other people can ; we are proud of the fact, sir. And, Monsieur Stranger, I have remarked on this point a great difference between our great country and the old continent. When a man, say of the age of sixty or seventy or upwards, fails in England or France, he is ruined for ever. He sits down to bewail his misfortune, and his wife and family become objects of pity to everyone and to themselves. Now, in our country, if a man of seventy fails he immediately goes to work again. There is a man whom I know

well who at seventy-two years of age became bankrupt. When I left Illinois he had started again full of confidence; he was looked upon with respect, and everyone believes that with a little luck he will get to the top of the wheel once more.'

'Ah,' said Yussuff, 'I must see the States; the energy of the people is wonderful. The solid wealth of the country has no precedent. They possess the power of doing everything. They are untrammelled; they employ all resources. They utilize every available means in every undertaking, from the most minute to the most magnificent. They are a great people, and they allow no capability to rest in idleness.'

'Shake, stranger,' said the long gentleman, half rising; 'your sentiments are those of a highly-cultured citizen of the world. This is my card, sir.'

Yussuff took it and read :

MR. RODERICK V DUNNE,

Mining Engineer,

GRAYVILLE, ILL., U.S.A.

'Are you a new arrival?'

'I have been two hours in Paris,' said Yussuff, 'and I want to find myself in comfortable rooms. Two of my men do not speak any European language, and I do not care to expose them to the jocoseness of hotel servants.'

'In that case it so happens that I can be of use to you,' said Dunne. 'A fellow-citizen of mine, Joseph

B. Moody, has just vacated very good rooms, No. 122, Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, *au troisième*. They are tastefully furnished ; you might go farther and fare worse.'

'Thanks exceedingly,' said Yussuff ; 'and could you still further oblige me by telling me how I can get to the Crédit Lyonnais?'

'Straight forward from the entrance—first to the right and then to the left. Good-bye, sir. I am happy to have met you. To an untravelled citizen your colour would be against you ; but I know the difference between races. You, sir, belong to the pure Caucasian breed. You are probably a prince in your own country. None of the damned nigger about you, sir. Good-bye. Paris is a gregarious locality. We shall meet again.'

Yussuff, who had no caste prejudices, demanded from the obsequious waiter another half-bottle of Chambertin, and, while discussing this renowned vintage, he drew from his pocket a packet, which consisted of a letter on ordinary paper, and a few sheets of foolscap folded into a small space. While he sipped his wine he read the letter with great care. Its contents ran thus :

'MY DEAR GUNNIS SING,

'As I am now expressing my thoughts to you, my honoured friend, the swift and strident ship *Péluse* walks the waters like a thing of life, bearing me towards the mighty Europe, whose historical

reminiscences fill the many corridors of my brain with mighty feelings, as if too much for your most humble of petitioners. I am in constant series of aspirations perennial, and not by any means discontinuous, that the Supreme Rulers endow you with the *mens sana in corpore sano*, medicinally, and of the spirit which conduces to a character worthy of admiration. I confide to your discrimination an article which my strong vanity designs for publication. It is an attempt, but in a modulated degree, to assert the future coming greatness of our race. With our subtle intellectual keenness, and the solids of British learning, to which I am now trusting to add some French polish, our castes must reach fame in futurity. I have been observant in my peregrinations, and to succeed now it is necessary to assimilate the most new that there is of all that is about us—to be up to date. You will observe that my article is type-written. This will please the editor. This missive will be despatched to you from the light-headed city of Paris. From there I shall take a short trip, or more than one, as the pursuit of knowledge will require, and in about a month I shall take my way, by the aid of the puffing monster, to the Eiffel country, and meet once more you, my good friend of the past. Till that happy hour, I bid you adieu, with *bahallah salaam*.

‘Yours ever truly,

‘YUSSUFF KHAN BAHADOOR.

‘P.S.—Write to me to *poste restante* in Paris.’

Gunnis Sing was not so well educated as Yussuff, who wrote to him accordingly.

Having paid his bill and tipped the waiter in a princely fashion, Yussuff returned to the Gare de Lyon, where he found his three servants sitting on their heels, with their backs against the wall, waiting, calm, content and patient. The Kitmeghar Mhadhurah sprang to his feet, put on his turban, slid off his slippers, and made a low salaam.

‘Now,’ said Yussuff, who spoke English to all who knew it, ‘get your baggage from the cloak-room.’

Mhadhurah soon obtained a bundle, some six feet in circumference, which contained as much as could be packed in two ordinary portmanteaus. It was wrapped in a sheet of coloured Bombay linen of great strength, and tied up with knots whose number and intricacy would have puzzled anyone but a native to the manner born.

A *fiacre* quickly conveyed master and man to the Gare St. Lazare. The time wanted ten minutes to the starting of the boat train.

‘Well, Mhadhurah,’ said his master, ‘in seven hours you will be in London, and see your wife. How long is it since she left you?’

‘Two years, now gone fifteen days, my wife going Colonel Jones Sahib, Bibee Sahib, doing ayah work for Bibee Sahib,’ said Mhadhurah. ‘I plenty sorry she going. I crying daily with loud voice. My mother done get me ’nother wife. Never liking that ’nother wife, sahib. She too much expense

causing. She no can cook my curry like my old wife, sahib. Therefore I plenty glad now going see my former wife, London town.'

'Very well, Mhadhurah. I have promised you a present if you do proper good work for me. Did you change your sovereigns when I told you? How many shillings did you get?'

'Twelve sovereigns, sahib; I done get four hundred shillings.'

'Very well. Soon as you get to England you change back again; you get twenty sovereigns.'

'That good business, sahib,' said Mhadhurah, with kindling eyes.

'Now, Mhadhurah, you understand what English gentlemen call a "tenner" ?'

'Yes, sahib, I know plenty well, sahib. Formerly same like one hundred rupees—now same like one hundred sixty-six rupees.'

'Right, Mhadhurah. You have been a very good servant. Here is fine present. *Ek, do, theen, char, panche*, five tenners, fifty pounds.'

Then a scene occurred which was certainly a first performance of its kind at the Gare St. Lazare. Mhadhurah dropped on his knees, and with reverence lowered his head, until he several times rubbed his forehead in the dust. He then slowly rose, but remained with the head bowed down, his hands held before him in the attitude of prayer. Tears rolled down his cheeks while in a choking voice he said :

'Sahib, you are my Providence, my Swamie, my

Diavaroo. You are my father ; you are also my mother. Now I can go back with my own proper wife to Mauritius. I plenty happy man, sahib. Master ever wanting me, I coming running to master. Master, when he returning back, I going Calcutta, Bombay, Madras—I coming soon as master calls. I think I go back with gentleman and lady ; my own wife go back ayah business on ship. Coming Mauritius, I begin little sawcar business—sawcar business best for pice-making.’

A few minutes afterwards the express steamed from the *gare*, Mhadhurah’s grateful eyes fixed to the last on his benefactor.

Yussuff for a time was lost in a reverie.

‘I am for the moment happy,’ he thought. ‘Is this good-nature, or is it pure selfishness? With fifty pounds I have made that man perfectly blest, and I am in consequence gratified myself. Yet I know that he will become a sawcar—a usurer. He will cause misery to hundreds. His present delight makes me happy. Am I, therefore, a good fellow? Honestly, I do not know. Action is the only true means of self-knowledge. Let us act.’

A few minutes saw Yussuff at the *Crédit Lyonnais*. He soon found himself handed over to an official, whom he took to be an Englishman, so perfect was his accent. After a short explanation, this gentleman, called De Tenaille by his colleagues, ushered Yussuff into an inner and most sumptuous apartment, where a very great man indeed sat in state.

The letter of credit, passport, and other credentials of the traveller were produced and found to be satisfactory. An account was opened with three millions and thirty thousand francs to the credit of Monsieur Yussuff Khan, and a cheque-book was handed to him. He drew ten thousand francs in notes, which were brought to him by De Tenaille in the manager's room.

Yussuff left the Crédit Lyonnais, walking at first with a thoughtful air, as of one who has serious work before him. Gradually the joyousness of Paris began to permeate his being. Was there ever such a perfect sunshine, with all the brilliancy of the tropics without the equatorial sultriness? 'Winter was gone away, the boulevard trees were waving;' everything was bright and beautiful, and Yussuff carried hope in his breast and in his pocket ready cash and a cheque-book—admirable conditions for enjoying life.

He turned his steps towards the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré, and quickly reached No. 122. The concierge told him that the present occupier of the *troisième* was in Havre, but that he had left orders that his furniture could be sold, and possession given at once, through a *notaire* who lived two streets away. The apartments were very comfortably furnished indeed; there was a very small anteroom—a mere pocket; a sitting-room, a dining-room, and a bedroom; a comfortable bath-room in the English style, and two rooms for servants' uses. The set

had evidently been fitted up by a man who had very clear ideas as to the best way of making himself comfortable. The furniture was handsome and solid. There was a grand piano, there were sybaritic chairs for the luxuriously lazy, double-action rocking-chairs to swing backwards and forwards, or right and left, at will to pitch or roll, and long-arm black-wood chairs in which the feet rest on supports as high as the head, with plaques which can be drawn out on each side: one for cigars, the other for glasses. There were deck-chairs of many kinds for those who preferred a cane-bottomed seat. The pictures were few and small, but good. Some sketches of trotting horses were very spirited indeed. Yussuff soon came to terms with the notary, and did not consider that he had done badly when he obtained full possession for a sum of eight thousand francs.

He quickly transferred his goods and chattels from the Gare de Lyon, and in a few hours his *ménage* was regulated. Three tiger-skins of unusual size with the claws on and a very fine sambre head were trophies to be proud of. A battery of rifles and several Oriental antique weapons, Khyber scimitars, tulwars, and zirah bactars of great beauty, with some Kashmir shawls and Delhi ornaments of gold and silver, gave a trace of tropical tinge to the general colouring, which was enhanced by the brilliant tints of the attire now donned by the two dark servants, of whom one remained always in the ante-room, immovable and patient, still as a statue, awaiting that

call of *Koh-i-hi* ! which showed that the master desired his presence. These servants were excellent attendants. They waited noiselessly as ghosts; they divined wants partly by instinct and partly by a marvellous and highly-developed power of observation, but they spoke neither French nor English. They did not even speak Hindoostani. They spoke a dialect of one of the Dravidian languages, the *patois* of Yussuff's native State.

Who was it said that lunch is an injury to dinner? There are those who think otherwise, who believe that it may be best regarded as a foundation for the later meal, and that the wider and the more perfect the basement, the greater is the superstructure which can be reared thereon. Yussuff, now perfectly satisfied with his domicile, looked round his rooms with the contented air of one who sees a work of installation well done; and the task of pleasure completed, a sense of duty recalled him to the consideration of the question of dinner. He did not feel that his book-learned knowledge of Paris was sufficient to justify him in experimenting on new *cuisines*, so eight o'clock found him once more in the *Café de la Paix*.

On entering, he walked mechanically to the place where he had sat at mid-day, and was immediately hailed by the American of the morning.

'Good-evening, Monsieur Stranger,' said he. 'So you have returned to the *Café de la Paix*; your doing so shows acumen and discrimination. Take

a seat. Allow me to introduce to you my friends—Monsieur Porthos, Monsieur Aramis, Monsieur Athos. Gentlemen, this is Monsieur Stranger, a prince in his own country.'

Yussuff bowed to three middle-aged young men, very well dressed, evidently Parisians by birth or by adoption. Porthos was a *rentier*, Aramis was a poet and painter, and in Athos Yussuff recognised Monsieur de Tenaille, the gentlemanly cashier whom he had met at the Crédit Lyonnais.

Like all Frenchmen, these 'Trois Mousquetaires,' as they loved to be called, possessed an air of perfect courtesy. Yussuff soon felt himself at home. He began to learn Paris with rapidity; he was an apt pupil, and his teachers were erudite. The three Parisians were interested in Yussuff just enough to show sympathetic natures. They were going with the American to the Grand Opéra, to stay only until the ballet, and then to a reunion of a character which possessed more than a tinge of Bohemianism. Yussuff was asked to join the party, and readily agreed.

CHAPTER II.

BOHEMIA.

THE end of dinner found Yussuff in a most contented state of mind. He found stealing over him a spirit of vivacity, a feeling of *élan*, which would carry him through anything. The opera was 'La Muette de Portici,' or 'Masaniello.' The plot includes a revolution and many murders, and among the two thousand auditors around there must have been many hundreds of revolutionists, and probably a few murderers. Paris has its realisms. The ballet was superb. There is only one ballet worth the time spent in looking at it, and that is at the Grand Opéra. Afterwards a rapid drive brought the friends to the ball of all the talents, and Yussuff looked on, while the musketeers were quickly among the dancers.

Quadrilles were in progress, and wonderful were the steps introduced. A great many students were present, and they showed off their activity in those marvellous gymnastics which a stranger may marvel at, but cannot hope to rival. Some remarkable feats of agility were performed. Yussuff looked on deeply interested until the music ceased.

'Holà, *mon ami*, you are not dancing!' said Aramis, coming up with a very pretty girl on his arm. 'Come, I will get you a partner. By the way, does monsieur waltz?'

‘Yes, I have learned to waltz, and I have practised with much diligence in Meerut,’ said Yussuff. ‘I think a good partner might succeed in taking me round.’

‘Ah, Aramis!’ said a musical voice. ‘Is it that you have forgotten me? Must I wait patiently for some more minutes until you shall have recovered your eyesight?’

‘Why, Estelle,’ cried Aramis with effusion, and turning to the new arrival, ‘can it be you? can the Faubourg spare you? We feared you had deserted your old resorts.’

‘Not so foolish,’ said Estelle. ‘I become weary of their staid demeanour. They have no laughter, no *cancan*, no whirl of fun, no *diablerie*, no free drinks. I long for my old haunts, I evade, I escape, I find myself in the scene of my old triumphs. There is my old seat; here are my old friends; and behold me: I am myself the old Estelle.’

‘Permit me, Estelle,’ said Aramis, ‘to introduce to you Monsieur Yussuff, a prince in his own country.’

‘Will mademoiselle confer on me the pleasure of waltzing with me?’ said Yussuff.

Mademoiselle consented—in a way.

‘One round,’ said she, ‘to show you the spectacle; then you will permit me to take Aramis, who can waltz better than anyone in Paris.’

She went off, smiling charmingly at Yussuff, and making a grimace over his shoulder to Aramis,

which was seen by her partner by double reflection. Whether from native talent or considerable practice, he possessed in the highest degree the faculty of seeing in many directions at once; and without appearing to do so, he never lost sight of the mirrors, a most useful habit in Paris and other localities.

In fact, Yussuff was not so unsophisticated as people took him to be. Life, in the modern sense of the term, is not quite unknown in India. Human nature is very much alike in all countries, and civilization in Hindoostan is already advanced to a degree little suspected by those who do not know the country, and Yussuff had moved among the sahibs.

Surprise for a moment overcame all other feelings in Estelle as she started to the exquisite strains of the best string band in Paris. The firm grasp of Yussuff, the easy swing, the smooth, elastic, velvety glide, proclaimed the perfect waltzer. He took her straight across the middle of the room. It was a miracle of guidance; the worst dancers were towards the centre. Estelle shuddered for a moment as she felt herself about to cut through the maelstrom of whirling fragments; but Yussuff seemed to have the faceted eyes of the dragon-fly, which sees in twenty directions at the same instant. His path twisted like a snake's; it shaved Scylla with infinite boldness and celerity, and escaped Charybdis by a space equal to a hair's

breadth. Dangers of velocity, dangers of mass, were evaded with the courage and skill of a master of the art.

‘If he can do that, he can do anything,’ thought Estelle.

A sublime confidence gradually possessed her soul.

‘Oh, monsieur,’ said she, ‘you waltz as well as I do! *Mon Dieu!* but this is enchanting. Do not stop; you can continue without ceasing until the end. Let us not lose an instant.’

Now, very few Parisians can waltz right through a seven minutes’ dance, and soon the floor became thinned. Then but one other couple was left; these sat down crimson and blown. The music ended; Estelle, panting and delighted, did not disguise her admiration for her partner’s handsome profile. She had forgotten Aramis. Yussuff was soon engaged to Estelle for the next five dances.

By the time these were finished they had become very good friends indeed, and by accident the whole party found themselves clustered together.

‘Messieurs et mesdames,’ said Yussuff, ‘will you do me the pleasure of taking supper with me? I observe it is now one o’clock, and the time for a change of scene has arrived. And will you, gentlemen, do me the great favour of introducing me to your recent partners, so that I may hope for the happiness they will confer on me by joining the party?’

‘We will join you with pleasure,’ said Athos; ‘but for the other ladies—that will keep for some other time. We would be too many. We are now six—quite enough for a room at the *Trois Sœurs*. Those rooms on the second story are not large. Do you yet know your Paris? If not, I may mention that the *Trois Sœurs* lies close by, and is a house in which one may trust. Also, monsieur, you and Estelle, and our good friend Hail Columbia, will dine with the three mousquetaires on Tuesday at Verey’s.’

A very little time saw the party seated at table in a small but comfortable room at the *Trois Sœurs*. Estelle was in a state of ecstasy. She was a sparkling, handsome girl, one of those beautiful Southerners whom destiny so often leads to Paris. Her profile was perfect. Masses of the darkest silky wavy hair, eyebrows and eyelashes almost black, a perfect complexion, and eyes which sparkled or softened, but were always beautiful, entranced the beholder. Her figure was sumptuous, and with that artistic genius which every Frenchwoman possesses, directly she obtained money she had learned how to dress to perfection. She had been successful, and of late she had lived more by rule; but she was delighted at her return to the Boulevard St. Michel.

‘Oh, your philosophers!’ said she; ‘they are fools; they know dry old books, but they do not know what one feels—what one believes. There is Aramis, says there is no future—no heaven—and

tried to bring me to his creed. That was some time ago, and I almost believed him; but now I know better—there is a heaven, and I am in it. When I was a little girl, I was good—oh, I was so good! I was a sweet little angel—a little saint. Do not laugh, Porthos, you old Gargantua! I was very good, so there! and because of that I have deserved heaven, and I have won it. Paris is heaven. What can heaven give more heavenly? Yes; I sometimes rest in my happiness for a few moments, and rejoice over the patience and trials of my youth, when I consider to what they have led me. What a missionary I should make, going round the provinces and preaching to all the little girls, “Be good and you will reach heaven; you will come to Paris”!’

‘Dressed in a bombazine straight up and down, made like a potato-sack, sandals of untanned hide, and all your hair cut off,’ said Porthos.

‘Not at all,’ said Estelle; ‘that would quite spoil my mission; the little girls of the provinces would be much more impressed if they saw me in a frock, such as—such as——’

‘Such as that you now wear,’ said Aramis; ‘it is divine.’

‘There is a truth which should be engraved over every *octroi* gate,’ said Dunne. “‘It is impossible to be in Paris and not be happy.’”

‘Yes, for the rich,’ said Porthos; ‘but for the poor?’

‘The poor may be miserable,’ said Dunne, ‘but their unhappiness is not the sordid despair of the country. Even the most poverty-stricken have your pure air, your bright sun, your palaces—open to all—your works of art, your glistening statues, so different from the hideous filthy marbles of London. The poorest in Paris have their gleams of forgetfulness, nay, even of mirth, and there is always something in which all are interested, which is talked about in every class. The misery of a man in Paris is happiness compared with the squalid, hopeless melancholy of provincial poverty.’

‘And at the worst,’ said Aramis, ‘one can always hope for a revolution.’

‘Yes,’ said Athos, ‘a revolution is good—there should be one every ten years. When we have been quiet for a time confidence shrivels up. The storm is brewing; everyone is afraid to venture in commercial affairs; money is tight. Then comes the revolution. We breathe again. The thunder is past; we know we are safe for some time to come. Money is made, and we can present Oriental gems to those we admire.’

‘Good, good!’ said Estelle; ‘you, Athos, are a profound politician. Alas! I have never seen a revolution. How I wish for one—the excitement, the whirlpool of events! I would sing the *Marseillaise*, like Rachel, with a red cap and a standard. The house would go wild. I should have a mountain of bouquets—perhaps one with a jewel attached; I

would search carefully—trust me ' Let us drink to the revolution.'

The toast was received with enthusiasm.

'What charming names our friends have!' said Yussuff to Estelle.

'Yes,' said she, 'and they are so like the real mousquetaires. There is Athos, so refined, so calm, so like an elder brother, but the greatest demon of the lot when started. And Porthos, he is superb; what magnificent biceps!'

The word 'biceps' struck on the ear of Porthos. His back mechanically straightened, as he drew a deep breath and puffed out his chest.

'Porthos, come here, said Estelle.

Porthos drew his chair closer, and she made several vain efforts to pinch the mighty muscles of his arm.

Yussuff had never seen a more magnificent limb. A very little encouragement led Porthos to speak of his athletic exploits. He was not only strong, but also, it appeared, a wonderful jumper.

'Now,' said Yussuff, 'I will bet you a napoleon that I beat you at jumping.'

'No, no,' said Estelle: 'you do not know what you do; he has beaten all Paris.'

'Nevertheless, I stake my napoleon all the same,' said Yussuff.

'Ah,' said Porthos proudly, 'you are a stranger, and do not know Paris. I will jump with you with pleasure, but not for a wager—it would not be fair.'

Nothing loath to show off, Porthos placed two small tables, three feet apart, with a small pile of books on each, and laid a cane across, about three feet six inches from the ground, and with a mighty bound cleared it. The house shook as he reached the floor.

Yussuff jumped the stick without an effort, and alighted on the points of his toes as light as a thistle-down, or a pole-jumper. His descent was noiseless.

Porthos immediately saw that he had encountered a trained athlete. He propped up the cane to a height of four feet three inches and cleared it—almost, but not quite. He touched it, but the graze was so slight that the cane was not displaced. Yussuff cleared it with ease.

Blank astonishment fell on the three musketeers.

‘Now,’ said Yussuff, ‘I challenge you to jump up on the mantelpiece, and stand there.’

The chimneypiece was about four feet eight inches high and two feet and a half broad. Porthos looked at it and shook his head.

‘It is impossible,’ said he. ‘It cannot be done.’

‘I’ll back my opinion to any reasonable amount,’ said Dunne, ‘that no man in the room can jump on that mantelpiece without a run.’

‘Done, for a pony!’ said Yussuff.

He crouched like a cat, and landed as light as a feather on the mantel. He then turned and faced the room, and with one bound alighted on the table,

while a second landed him comfortably in his chair beside Estelle, who clapped her hands in delight, and immediately turned to console Porthos by the most kindly and artful flatteries.

‘Well,’ said Dunne, as he handed over the six hundred and twenty-five francs, ‘I am surprised! I always understood that you Orientals were indolent in the extreme, and that athleticism was unknown in the gorgeous East.’

‘This is one more instance,’ said Yussuff, ‘of the ignorance of India which is so common among Europeans, and which at first astonished me, until I reached a stage at which nothing of that kind could any longer cause me any surprise. Why, for instance, in the town of Mysore, near Seringapatam, a city of about eighty thousand inhabitants, there are sixteen gymnastic schools. The finest athletic game in the world is polo, and that you get from India; our swordmanship is known.’

‘Do you fence?’ said Aramis.

‘Yes,’ said Yussuff; ‘at our college in Ajmeer we learned fencing.’

‘Bring foils,’ said Aramis.

They were quickly obtained. Estelle was at once frightened and charmed. She did not quite understand, but she saw the flashing swords; she felt that the coming fight was directly or indirectly on her account, and her bliss was perfected by the fact that she had a dearly-hated bosom friend to whom she could tell it all to-morrow.

The eye of the trained fencer is keen in its comprehension. Yussuff saw at once that Aramis was a mere ordinary swordsman. He disarmed him in a moment.

Yussuff picked up the foil and handed it to Aramis, who gave it to Porthos, saying :

‘ I have no chance.’

Porthos’s vanity was such that he believed himself to be a good fencer, but he was subdued as easily as Aramis.

Athos then took the foil. Yussuff perceived that he now had a totally different antagonist to deal with.

Athos recognised the fact that he had to do with a man good enough to be a *maître-d’armes*, but he had full confidence in himself and played cautiously, seeking to discover something of his adversary’s style. He learnt all too soon for his peace of mind, for, after a brisk rally, Yussuff, with the rapidity of lightning, changed his feet, threw his sword into his left hand, and taking Athos completely at a disadvantage, disarmed him.

‘ Monsieur,’ said Aramis, ‘ we have long lived without you ; we have long sought for you, and we shall mark with a red letter the day on which we have found you. You are the D’Artagnan of our party. We will drink to your health. We will raise you on our arms. Porthos, lend your strength.’

They raised Yussuff aloft, and quaffed fresh beakers to his honour, while Estelle, springing on the table, crowned him with a tureen.

Then Athos sang a song which he had composed that morning. It was like a *chanson* of Alfred de Musset, but his friends thought it better.

Estelle followed and afforded a new surprise to Yussuff. Her whole nature seemed transformed. She sang a song of the country, a sad song of a young mother dying in a cottage buried in roses. She sang with a tenderness and feeling that produced the keen melancholy which is the highest tribute to sweet melody. When the song ended there was a moment of profound silence. Then Estelle's head dropped upon her hands, and she burst into tears; every eye was moist.

'Ah!' cried Aramis, 'her heart is tender; she is sympathetic; her feelings vibrate in a minor key.'

'I think,' said Dunne, 'a little "bac" would be beneficial as a change.'

'Yes, yes,' said Estelle, 'a little bac;' and she immediately became all animation. Cards were soon brought. Yussuff knew nothing of the game of baccarat, but Dunne explained it to him with scientific clearness and brevity. Yussuff was an apt pupil. He seemed to have a natural genius for the calculation of chances. When daylight came a pile of gold lay beside him. The others were cleared out; Estelle had lost everything, borrowed and lost again.

'Lucky in cards, unlucky in love,' said Estelle.

'A beginner at any game always wins,' said

Yussuff; 'but I shall avoid the ill-fortune you predict by getting rid of what I have won.' Saying which, he pushed the pile over to Estelle. 'I beg, mademoiselle, that you will buy a necklace in memory of this night, on which you have conferred so much happiness, and that you will always wear it whenever you sing that charming song which gave us all so much delight.'

'I will do so,' said Estelle, 'since you put the matter in that way; and should hard times come, that necklace will be the very last jewel I shall part with to the *mont-de-piété*.'

The party then broke up with hearty hand-shakes, and arrangements for future meetings.

CHAPTER III.

HAUT TON.

NEXT morning Yussuff started early on a walk along the boulevards, and soon came across the shop of an engraver. He went in, and after a short delay received a hundred visiting-cards engraved :

PRINCE YUSSUFF,
122, Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré.

He called and left cards on his friends of the previous night whose addresses he had ascertained.

He next visited a tailor and gave extensive orders, and then settled down steadily to the life of the *flâneur*. He breakfasted at Versailles. In the evening he found himself near the Café Américain, into which he turned. Here he found Dunne, deep in a discussion on mines with a colonel who had been in every campaign from Bull's Run to Richmond, and a judge who was intimately acquainted with every millionaire from New York to Frisco. Dunne asked him to dine with him at D'Orrey's, and afterwards proposed a game at *écarté*. This game was not one of Yussuff's accomplishments, but after a few lessons at low points he began to learn very rapidly. He became interested, and declared his intention of buying a book and studying the science of the game. He had the usual luck of beginners. Dunne was a good player, but there are cards which beat any amount of skill, and Yussuff won twelve hundred francs. When the hour was up, Dunne stopped playing.

'I play a little every day if I can,' said he. 'The excitement does me good after I have dined. I seldom play heavy stakes, and I never play long. Now, if you like, I will take you to a crush at which a good many of my fellow-citizens will be found, and you can spend an evening sociably. It will be quite a different affair from last night's, and much less amusing, but one must know the world in different aspects.'

Yussuff agreed at once, and they were quickly

among a stream of carriages drawing up before a splendid house in the Boulevard des Capucines. The names of Prince Yussuff and Mr. Dunne passed from servant to servant, and they made their way through a dense crowd to where Mrs. Clement C. Denning received her guests. Dunne introduced the Prince, and the lady bestowed upon him fourteen seconds of her precious time, which should have been equally divided between five other arrivals.

Yussuff was presently introduced to Mrs. Street-Houston, a millionairess from Denver City, who evidently was under the impression that all princes are members of reigning families. She had not been long in Europe. She danced a Lancers with him, and addressed him very frequently as 'Your Royal Highness,' in a voice evidently meant to be overheard by her friends. She told him her 'At Home' day, and introduced him to several other members of the 'four hundred,' and in a very short time he had invitations enough to keep him fully occupied for a fortnight. He had no difficulty in overhearing a continuous buzz of remarks about himself. The strange thing was that everyone seemed to know all about him, though their accounts differed. He was a nephew of the Ameer; he was the Rajah of Cochin China; he was proprietor of Dwalagerri; he was the son of Gengis Khan.

One lady with whom he danced a mazourka asked him what was the name of the wonderful jewel he possessed. He told her it was the *mootee talao*. The

lady communicated this interesting fact to twelve people, each of whom immediately told it to twelve others, who repeated the operation, so that in a few minutes seventeen hundred and twenty-eight individuals knew all about the *moor's case*. A clever French journalist was soon giving to an attentive circle a detailed history of the famous stone, with an account of a few of the hundred and eight murders which marked its history.

His hostess now approached and told him that Mrs. Silas J. Batman wished for an introduction.

'I must tell you, said she, that Psyche Willowey was considered the finest girl in the Shenandoah Valley, and she is a fine woman still, though she has become too fleshy. She very seldom dances now, though she used to be quite famous as a terpsichorist; but she will be glad to dance with you.

Yussuff was led up to a lady who was certainly all that is conveyed in the phrase 'a fine woman.' His request for a waltz was at once granted, and the lady sprang lightly from her seat. She was six feet high, three feet wide, and two and a half feet thick, with a face which would have been grandiosely beautiful if seen through the wrong end of a telescope. She was more erect than a grenadier—in fact, she had a magnificent carriage, with a Grecian bend backwards. She told him in an infantile voice that her husband had forbidden her to dance.

'He says my dimensions are too great, she said plaintively. 'I sometimes contrive to get a waltz

when he is away, and anybody asks me. But gentlemen seem afraid of me ; they think I must be heavy in hand, whereas I am as light as a rose-leaf in early spring, as I have often been told in the Valley of the Shenandoah, and I am passionately fond of dancing. I used always to do twenty-five dances in an evening, and tire down all the best partners in our city. Do you know, really, I am so obliged to you for asking me. My husband won't in the least mind my waltzing with a prince.'

Away they sailed. Like many stout people, Mrs. Silas J. Batman danced as lightly as a feather. There was nothing flabby about her. All was firm muscle ; eighteen stone weight of bounding india-rubber—away she travelled. She went on her own course. She was the planet, Yussuff was the satellite ; he was the one to describe epicycloids. Yussuff had a genius for waltzing. He quickly accommodated himself to the new and unprecedented circumstances, and found the sensation strange and very enjoyable. She wafted him along ; he became exhilarated by the motion. All he had to do was to hold on tight. No collisions for them. No one ran the risk. When Mrs. Silas J. Batman charged, the enemy retired before contact. She went on without a moment's rest until a little after the band stopped ; and as he led her to her seat, Yussuff felt that his day had not been lost : he had made one person supremely happy.

Next came a Lancers, in which the four ladies

were all about forty, were all fair, all with a pleasing tendency to *embonpoint*, and all remarkably well dressed. Yussuff's partner was a *grande dame de par le monde*, who spoke English fluently, and made him at once feel quite at his ease. She was wonderfully well informed and epigrammatic. She knew that, as she had not met him before, he must be a new arrival in Paris.

In a few witty sentences she explained the *carte du pays*, and with four words to each gave a piece of the history of quite a number of the people. Finally, coming to their own set, he learned that the man on his left was an unmarried Napoleonic duke, who liked Americans, and that the lady on his left was a Neapolitan marchesa, recently divorced. His *vis-à-vis*, who wore an amethyst necklace, was a Mrs. Tacker, from Jellalabad, 'a great friend of mine,' and her partner was a man who had made a fortune in Madagascar.

Yussuff thought as he looked at Mrs. Tacker that she must once have been a very striking-looking woman, largely gifted with the *beauté du diable*, of which a great deal still remained, though there was now rather less of the *beauté* and rather more of the *diable*.

The last figure commenced. The band played the old original fifth of the Lancers, which the young people had never heard, and the older ones could scarcely remember. A chord, then on they went in the grand chain. In and out Yussuff wound, until

he met his *vis-à-vis*, when he felt, to his surprise, a distinct squeeze of his hand. Now, Yussuff had had that kind of experience before, but under different circumstances, with more of a preface, so to speak. He forgot that he was now a prince. A moment afterwards he fancied he must have been mistaken; but in the next chain there could no longer be a doubt on the matter.

In the promenade following the dance, Yussuff, with practised skill, steered his partner towards the refreshment room in such a manner as almost to collide with Mrs. Tacker. An apology led the way to an introduction. Yussuff soon wrote upon his card the name of Mrs. Tacker, though the corresponding space in her programme had been already occupied.

After the dance the pair found their way to a remote and small room, which for the moment was empty. Yussuff sat down expecting to be enthralled, and he was. Forty is the age of fascination—indeed, some ladies are all-conquering who own to forty-eight. Yussuff felt himself enveloped and subdued by an atmosphere of almost imperceptible flattery. He was surrounded by a cloud of incense, through which played lightning flashes of wit, rapid sketches of dear friends, which were as scathing as they were laughable. He was interested, excited.

As he gazed through the cloud of adulation, Mrs. Tacker seemed to undergo a magical change. She became younger, brighter, her hair more golden, her

eyes more blue. Never had a Dudu more divine hands and arms. Was it that the rings showed off the hands, or the hands showed off the diamonds? And her little feet could be seen occasionally. The band struck up. He offered his arm.

'Gracious me! the "Roast Beef of Old England." A new phase of Anglomania,' said Mrs. Tacker, as they rushed in to supper with all the dash and vigour of experienced veterans.

The supper rooms lay not far from their recent seats. Mrs. Tacker could talk as much and eat as much as if she did each separately. Yussuff as usual acted on the principle 'take the goods the gods provide thee.' The champagne was excellent, and words expressive of the admiration which pervaded his being came immediately and involuntarily, as a reply to the challenge of her bright eyes, now brighter still; and he soon became convinced that Mrs. Tacker was either very much in love with him, or was a desperate flirt or both. But supper, like everything else, came to an end, and he led her forth to that bliss which crowns bliss - that zenith of delight, the after-supper waltz.

As the waltz finished a pompous elderly gentleman informed her that the Duchess, with whom she had come, was about to start for another reception, and that her carriage waited. Mrs. Tacker went off with the new arrival, forbidding Yussuff to follow, but threw back a Parthian glance as she disappeared and left him plunged in thought, from which he was

aroused by Mr. Dunne, who informed him that he was wanted by his hostess.

‘I reckon,’ said he, ‘there are in this festive assembly about eight hundred females of various types and ages, and to satisfy the claims of society you will have to dance once with each one of them before you leave. Anyone left out will be eternally offended.’

Yussuff was now presented to Miss Kitty Browne, one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen. Her slender figure was inexpressibly graceful; her features were of the purest Grecian type; her hands and feet were even too small for the canons of classic art. But her eyes were her striking feature; they were a perfect azure, and, like all eyes of that rarest of colours, were capable of an almost infinite variety of expression. There is a frankness about the gaze of American girls when speaking to a man which in its perfection no others possess. There is an absence of shyness so marked that a superficial observer might for an instant think their demeanour verged on boldness, but never was there a greater mistake. There is, in truth, as little of the forward as of the demure. American girls are accustomed from their earliest days to deal with men on terms of intellectual equality. Having dispensed with chaperons, they feel an independence and a complete reliance on their own resources which is the secret of the subtle charm which they undoubtedly possess.

The third and last set of Lancers was about to commence as Kitty Browne stood up with Yussuff. She continued without an effort the sketch of what she thought ought to be altered in the constitution of Montana, a subject under discussion at the moment of his introduction to her. Yussuff expressed surprise at her minute knowledge of so intricate a subject.

‘Oh,’ said she, ‘I know all about statesmanship; my Pop always talks politics to me.’

Now be it remarked that this was the first and the last time that he ever heard from Miss Browne what English people call an Americanism. Really well-bred Americans have no Americanisms and no accent. There are three hundred and ninety-two thousand people who agree without one dissentient voice that the best English is spoken in Boston.

Classical music is an excellent promoter of conversation. Next to it comes dancing. Miss Browne talked well on every subject. She had been only two years in Paris, but she knew it better than many natives of that city of light. An American in a week will know more of London than the smartest Cockney of them all. Yussuff felt intensely interested in this fully developed and educated, yet most essentially feminine, woman, and he felt a momentary irritation at the restraints of conventionality which rendered it so impossible on first acquaintance to seek for the inward ideas and real feelings of a personality which promised so much.

Miss Browne spoke about men's subjects with a masculine breadth of view, a clearness of insight and a knowledge of detail which surprised as much as it charmed, while everything was touched with a grace of feeling and elegance of thought which was distinctly feminine. A waltz succeeded, and Yussuff discovered that he had yet something to learn in that art from young America. In spite of himself, he could not help contrasting his present experience with his last dance with Mrs. Tacker. Miss Browne was as light as a feather of eider-down. Speed made no change in her colour; it only brought a warmer glow into her azure eyes. They taught each other the 'Boston dip' and the 'artillery stride,' and parted very good friends. Yussuff was a good listener.

In dreams that night many dangers akin to those of the past haunted him, but ever the sweet, saintly face of the fair American appeared to sustain him under every trial, and to confer on him a new worthier nature far elevated above the sordid past. What made him attach the term 'saintly' to his impression of this most beautiful girl he could not himself explain. But so it was, and, as he thought of her, recollections of Estelle and Mrs. Tacker flashed through his mind, and did not gain by the inevitable comparison.

CHAPTER IV

THE GAME.

NEXT morning, however, the impressions of the night became faint, though not to the point of obliteration. He found himself with all Paris before him and every opportunity of having a 'high old time of it,' to adopt the phrase of the vivacious schoolboy.

As he was about to start on his day's round of amusement, one of his retainers entered with a note on a salver, saying in his Dravidian *patois* that the Mem sahib had sent a *chit* by a messenger with plenty many salaams for the sahib.

'Shiva and Shravanabellagoolah,' quoth Yussuff. 'The *chits* commencing again. When will history stop repeating itself!'

There could be no mistake as to the nature of the neat missive, with its heavy odour of musk. Mrs. Tacker told him where she would be that evening, and promised to obtain for him a card for that function. He answered in a note, promising to be there after supper. He went first to another place, graced by the presence of Miss Browne. He told Mrs. Tacker boldly that he could not live without a little gambling after dinner. She freely forgave his delay on this excuse. She was most agreeable, lively, sarcastic, and amusing, and she possessed

that most fascinating of all gifts, the talent of appreciation.

Yussuff now got about fifty invitations a day. All Paris talked about this educated Oriental magnate. He got a very neat mail phaeton, made in Long Acre for a young English nobleman who had stayed a short time in Paris on his way to Shimonoseki. After a long search he picked up separately two coal-black steeds about fifteen three, each with a white star on his forehead. They were showy horses of the Boulangist war-horse type, with great fore action, not high, but far reaching, with manes and tails which Buonarotti would have delighted to portray, and slender below the knee. And yet not old Ali-Asker himself knew a real horse better than did Yussuff. But he also knew his critics.

His life was a very full one. Like most votaries of pleasure, he never had a moment to himself; he would have wished to add four hours to each day, and ten minutes to each hour. He was a man of thirty-five, and his life had been a varied one, but he had never been sufficiently long in one unchanged groove to feel the irksomeness of ennui. He met both Miss Browne and Mrs. Tacker constantly, but never at the same time. One evening Miss Browne told him that she had taken to golf.

Memories of old days came back to Yussuff. He was once more in bachelor quarters in the Cubbon Hotel on the high ground in the far East. Two of

the cheeriest of companions, one a telegraph department man, one a planter, both on leave, were with him and a few others in a shady veranda. Pegs and cigars, kus-kus tatties, and punkahs, burruf ice, and belatie pawnie spread around an air of Oriental luxury. A blazing tropical sun could be seen through the chicks. It was the most suffocating part of the day, in the most stifling period of the hot season. Looking out through a break in the screens, they saw a man in a huge sola topee, dressed in karkie, tramping across the treeless high ground. Behind him came a chokra with a golf-bag.

‘Well,’ said the telegraph man, known as Wires, ‘of all the forms of insanity, the golf craze is the worst. There goes Bevan. He only got out of bed a few days ago, after his Cyprus fever, and off he goes, in a sun strong enough to knock down an elephant, to play that most ridiculous of all games.’

‘Madness!’ said King Koffee. ‘And how an active grown-up man can play such a game passes my comprehension!’

‘Yes,’ said Wires. ‘I can fancy a couple of doddering old gentlemen, in search of appetites, taking a childish pleasure in knocking a golf-ball about; but for a grown man to play golf beats me. I would as soon dandle a doll. Tennis, now, is a game for an athlete; it requires strength, endurance, coolness, nerve, a straight eye, a quick hand, and any amount of science. But golf—faugh!’

Two days after, under similar circumstances, the

same company was assembled, all except the coffee-planter. And where was he ?

‘Where is King Koffee ?’ asked one, of his friend Wires.

‘Joined the lunatics,’ said Wires. ‘I am afraid he has been drinking too much and gone off his head ; you see, he doesn’t get ice on his estate, and he finds such an unaccustomed luxury makes his pegs more insinuating. Sober or irresponsible, however, I cannot comprehend how a man who looked on golf with such contempt could become a victim.’

Three days afterwards Wires succumbed, and tried to infect everyone else with the fever. Yussuff found himself engaged to join the club, and to help Miss Browne to learn the game, with delight at a prospect of her society, and with horror of the slowness of the sport. But he found golf to be a most interesting pastime, and, more than any other amusement of modern or ancient days, meant to lend every opportunity to the communion of souls.

One day the conversation turned on Mahomedanism. Miss Browne had an open mind, and was quite prepared to hear the good parts of any system of ethics. For herself, she followed, when at home, the Reverend Jonathan V Smallpiece, who had the Truth. Her views on many spiritual points were firm, clear, and sharply defined. On some other subjects the Right Reverend had not yet made up his mind, and she was prepared to wait until his

system of theology should on those points be fully developed. This style of discussion completely captivated Yussuff. He had never been in love with a religious woman before.

One day she was all excitement. She asked him if he had ever seen polo played. He had, and had played a good deal. He explained to her that the natives of Bajour, Chitral, and Hanza-Nagyr are the best players in the world. An English team had challenged Paris, and was to arrive in a few days.

Miss Browne's greatest friend was an English young lady, not long out, who had crowed loud and long over the beating her countrymen were to give the Parisian team, which, by the way, was mainly composed of Americans. One man was wanted to make up the number.

'And you really can play,' said she, 'as well as English officers?'

'They play well,' said Yussuff; 'but when the 24th Hussars lay in Banglepore, they had as good a team as any in the service, and yet we taught them a thing or two.'

Miss Browne immediately handed her niblick to the caddie, and they drove off together to find the man who 'bossed' the team, a friend of Miss Browne's. An animated discussion took place. Yussuff was mounted and brought to play in a field not far from Villacoublay, as one of four. He was best man of the lot, and the rest nowhere. The offer of his services was gratefully accepted, the chances of the

Parisian team being materially improved thereby; but Yussuff saw clearly that the others were totally unfit to go into the same field with the Englishmen.

He heard, however, that there was one good man coming, an American; and great things were hoped from a Chasseur d'Afrique from Algeria, who some years before had introduced polo among the Kabyles, and who was coming to Paris. Yussuff soon after despatched a telegram to Messrs. Dashitall, in London.

Messrs. Dashitall's manager was within a very short time engaged in the study of this message, which stated that 'Two trained polo ponies are wanted to play in the International match next Wednesday, ten stone two. Twelve hundred pounds put to your credit for this purpose in London and Westminster Bank, Brompton Square branch, through Crédit Lyonnais. Wanted for a Chitral player.'

The manager thought over the subject very deeply. By telephone he ascertained that a person he knew was at a certain club; he asked his friend to wait there for him. He proceeded to the club, and was soon in earnest conversation with his friend. The result of the various items of information which each was able to give to the other was that the best player on the English side was that morning laid up with compound fracture of the thigh.

Polo had taken root among the cow-boys, and their best man was on his way to Paris across the

Atlantic. The Algerian crack was known as a good man, and the addition of a Chitral player might make a French victory possible. The result of these cogitations was that two ponies, as good as any in England, were sent to Paris, and placed in Yussuff's stables.

Up to that time there had been no betting on the event, which was looked upon as a foregone conclusion. But now in some mysterious manner it became known that someone had been mad enough to back the French team—at very long odds, of course ; but still, money was on the French, to win or to draw.

Yussuff now had serious work before him. He had no need to get into good condition, for he was already as hard as nails. The prime mover of the affair was a Mr. Boss, a wealthy American, who loved a quiet, cantering, dribbling game of polo with men of his own age, on weight-carrying ponies under thirteen hands. Polo-playing requires a wrist of steel, and Yussuff had but a short time to get his forearm muscles into playing form. He found from Mr. Boss that the Chasseur d'Afrique had sent on his ponies a month in advance. Yussuff took them out, and kept them going, as well as his own.

He was already a notability in the Parisian world, and reporters were soon after him. Two Americans were coming over, one a man from Texas, and the other a citizen of Colorado, bred in Galway. They were bringing their ponies with them, as they in-

tended to spend some time in France; but as there was little chance of these being fit by the day fixed, Yussuff advised Mr. Boss to do as he had done, and wire to England for gee-gees. This was done. Messrs. Dashitall fully maintained their reputation, and five more perfect ponies could not be produced than those sent over, one extra being obtained as a reserve.

Yussuff kept the whole lot in exercise. In India he had thought little of a ride of two hundred miles on posted horses. The Chasseur d'Afrique and the two Americans arrived in Paris on the same day.

They had a turn with the other Parisian players, and proved incomparably their superiors. These four were then selected as the representatives of Paris. Living in Paris, they were Parisians by a universally accepted law.

'Now,' said Mr. Boss, 'you must settle among yourselves who is to be captain.'

'If the shade of Burton Persse was here,' said the Colorado-Galway man, 'he would state without any hesitation that there can be only wan choice in the case: the Prince will be our captain.'

'Why, certainly,' said Texas, 'he is the best player.'

'He is the best player,' said the Chasseur, 'and he knows more of the game. Besides, he has already played against these English officers, and he knows their tactics.'

Yussuff accepted the responsibility, and he soon began to believe that he had got together a very

strong team indeed. Each one had been the polo king of his own region, and ere long Yussuff perceived that they all played quite as well as he did himself. The Chasseur's style was brilliant. He possessed the *coup d'œil* of a born cavalry officer; his riding was faultless. He could have kept goal, but that he had not yet played the English. His place was naturally No. 2. No. 2 has to aid the front and rear, and do his own play into the bargain, Colorado-Galway naturally played as No. 1, and Yussuff as No. 4, keeping goal himself, selected Texas as No. 3. Texas possessed coolness and judgment to an unusual degree.

The business now was to train them to work together. They played against a number of Parisian teams, but these games were all 'skittles.' They got up a team from Bordeaux. These were a little better. Then Yussuff tried playing against five Bordelais instead of four. This required more of an effort, but then it wasn't the game; and all this time the English, at Hurlingham and Ranelagh, were playing teams as good as themselves.

He had no difficulty in keeping his men up to the mark as far as training and play went. They were as keen on work as he was himself.

By this time, in Paris, polo had become the *mot du jour*. The *Figaro* sent a reporter to Hurlingham. Wonderful stories were circulated as to ponies which, in despair of legitimate victory, had caught the ball between their teeth and galloped with it between

the opposite goal-posts ; and over a dozen new polo clubs were formed in Paris.

The day before the contest two of the Englishmen were ordered off—one to Dongola and one to Chakatra. This broke up their team, and greatly increased Yussuff's chance of success.

At length the eventful day arrived. The English had had a very stormy crossing, of which their ponies showed the effects. The ground was in capital order. The carriages were parked on two sides. The concourse was immense. The day was clear, with a faint breeze.

The clock struck, and the combatants rode into the ground to the minute. Eight finer centaurs were never seen.

It is scarcely necessary in these days to inform the general reader that in polo two posts eight yards apart form a goal. A similar goal is erected at a distance of 250 yards. The ball used is made of wood and very elastic, and the object of each party is to drive the ball through the adversaries' goal. No. 1 player is nearest the adversaries' goal ; No. 2 and No. 3 come next ; and No. 4—generally the captain—defends his own goal. The ground at Vallacoublé was bounded by boards, and the goal-posts were made of palm-leaves fascined, to minimize danger from collision.

The ball was thrown in, and the game began. Polo is perhaps the most continuously exciting game that there is. The ponies, all perfectly

trained, behaved splendidly. They understood the game almost as well as their riders. A well-trained pony will follow the ball, turn to the right or left, and save collisions. When a back-handed stroke is given, a pony will instantly pivot round and make a reverse. If a ball be dribbling near home, a pony will rush *ventre-à-terre* to save a goal. Directly a goal is made the ponies stop on the moment, and no one can doubt from their looks that they know perfectly whether their side has won or lost.

At the end of fifteen minutes time was called. Nothing had been effected. This sent the French temperature up many degrees. Play again commenced, in downright earnest. A senior lieutenant of the 24th Hussars played third in the English team. This was the regiment Yussuff had played against in Banglepore. After a desperate rally the lieutenant got away, caught the ball second hop, as it was three inches off the ground, and sent it whizzing through the air, to the extreme left-hand end of Yussuff's goal. All seemed lost when——

Yussuff dropped his bridle, flung his mallet into his left hand, and just reached the ball, which he touched obliquely, and saved the goal amidst uproarious applause.

Texas knew by the sound of the blow that Yussuff's stick was sprung. Quick as thought, he took his place. Yussuff went and got a new weapon, and within eight seconds of the blow he was nearly back in his old place. It is a law of the game that

no one may bring a fresh stick to any player. If he wants a new one he must fetch it himself.

The incident seemed to have thrown the whole field off the *qui vive*. It was as if a whist-party had heard free shooting in the street, and for a second or two had lost touch with the game. It was only Yussuff who continued keen as ever. As he raced back he saw his chance. Texas kept the goal, Yussuff's place. Let him stay there. Yussuff got the ball coming diagonally; he struck it towards the enemy's goal, and dashed after it, passing his own No. 2. Here he was collared by the Hussar. Yussuff gave a furious back-hander diagonally to the right under his horse's nose. The ball struck the boundary board, and rebounded. Like a racquet-player or a fives-player, Yussuff met it exactly, on its backward course; the English goalkeeper, a junior captain, had come a little too far forward, and with full force of man and horse Yussuff sent the ball over the junior captain's head, and right through the centre point between the English goal-posts.

First goal for the French! The spectators went almost off their heads with excitement. Play was again commenced. The English this time began with their back teeth set, and won a goal in ten minutes.

Mid-time was now called and ponies changed. With one goal each, it might be anyone's game, except for the fact that the English had won their

goal so easily. The new ponies had been looking at the game for some time, and they were all eagerness. The Hussar said afterwards that the next five minutes was the quickest play he had ever been through. The French were lost in admiration, when—crash! Eight horses' legs vertical and kicking in the air, while underneath lay the Hussar and Colorado-Galway.

However, the men's ribs and limbs were of iron, and the ponies were light. '*On se débrouillerait.*' They got on their feet. The men looked at the ponies, the ponies looked at the men. All four shook themselves, and would have thought no more about the incident, but that the Hussar's left wrist was badly hurt. It was dislocated and bent back, and also not only sprained, but the tendons were torn.

A surgeon and his assistant ran down; the grooms had already arrived. The French doctor was skilful, and the dislocation was at once reduced. He then took a roll of bandage linen and bound up the wrist, arm, hand and fingers, and improvised a sling. The pony looked on sympathizingly and pityingly. He loved his master like a faithful dog.

This pony had been trained by the Hussar himself, who now came close to the animal and held out towards him his bandaged hand.

The pony touched it with his prehensile lip.

The Hussar lightly pulled the pony's ears and stroked his neck, looking earnestly into his eyes.

‘Now, Rip,’ said he, speaking as if to a human being, ‘you must play this game yourself. I know I can trust you.’

The Hussar then mounted, aided by his groom. By means of his left elbow and his right hand, he tied a knot in his reins, and dropped them on the pony’s neck.

His groom got a piece of the surgeon’s bandage linen, and fastened the loop of the reins back to the stirrup-leathers, so that they might not fall over the pony’s head. The Hussar then turned and cantered to his place. His knees gave all the guidance required.

The French were delighted. Courage always appeals to them. ‘*Comme il est brave ! Bon soldat ! C’est magnifique !*’—until all joined in one grand shout, ‘*Vive le brave ! vivent les Anglais !*’

Yussuff joined in the acclamations. Instead of a belt, he played in a genuine khummerbund, a piece of fine silk, thirty-six feet long, wound eighteen times round his waist. He untied a few yards of it, and wound it on again, tying his left arm to his body. He then, by means of his right hand and left elbow, tied his reins in a loop, dropped them on his pony’s neck, got them hitched to his stirrup-leathers, and cantered to the Chasseur’s place, requesting him to relieve Texas, and Texas to keep goal.

Generosity, equally with courage, will always appeal to the French nature. Tumultuous applause followed, and in countless carriages ladies stood

up and waved their handkerchiefs in delighted approval.

The two free ponies behaved admirably. In fact, to both Yussuff and the Hussar occurred the idea: 'Let us every now and then have a game without reins.' Play went on fast and furious, until umpires called 'Time up.'

Result, a drawn game.

CHAPTER V.

THE PROPOSAL.

WHEN Yussuff came out of the tent, he strode directly towards the place where he had last seen Miss Browne's carriage. He was, as a rule, 'as sharp as they make 'em,' but he walked within twenty yards of Mrs. Tacker without seeing her. That mature beauty had been prepared to welcome him with effusion, but she saw that he had no thoughts for her. She felt as if a veil had suddenly dropped from her eyes, and a cold, heavy feeling, as if of a weight of lead, pressed on her heart. She turned lividly pale, except two bright red spots which burned in her cheeks. She bit her lip until it hurt her. The fact is, she was just as much in love as she used to be when she was seventeen, and Yussuff was the hero of the hour. He had played a man's part among men. He had shown daring,

nerve, courage, skill, activity and strength. He was bold and dashing, beautifully slender and graceful, and divinely handsome—and he had passed her without seeing her. She literally swallowed her rage with a slow, struggling gulp, and watched where he went to.

Miss Browne had left her carriage, and was walking up and down in a state of delighted excitement. She saw Yussuff approach.

‘Prince,’ said she warmly, holding out her hand, ‘you played a ripping game, and we are awfully obliged to you.’

A number of Americans came round him, and he was made much of in a way to greatly gratify a man by no means devoid of vanity. But strange feelings made his heart pulsate as he saw how *she* rejoiced in his glory. Man is curiously constituted. If it had been anyone else, he would have felt that she was almost too open in the display of her interest in him; but he had already reached a stage in which whatever she did was sure to be right, and he saw in her present bearing the frank honesty of one who scorned to conceal her feelings.

Yussuff returned to Paris a very happy man. He dined in company with Dunne, feeling as if in a dream. When he sat down to *écarté* afterwards, he for the first time in his life began to think that some time or other he would give up gambling altogether. He played carelessly and lost a good deal of money, which, we may remark, Mr. Dunne was a good deal

in need of. He had lost to this unsophisticated Hindoo nearly four thousand pounds, and he had been compelled to cable for a remittance. He had sent for fifty thousand dollars, but the money would not arrive for a few days, so that he was glad to pick up something to go on with, and still more to welcome a change of luck which might lead to the getting of his own again, and something more at the back of it.

Yussuff next found himself at a ball, where he knew *she* would be. As he entered he met Mrs. Tacker, who gave him Nos. 5, 10 and 15—very much against his will. Mrs. Tacker now jarred upon his feelings. He had not seen Estelle for a week. He had not looked across the street at a pretty girl for more than two days; womankind of every sort was repulsive to him, save the one being without whom he now felt that life would be unendurable. He soon found her, and begged for as many dances as she could spare. She granted him No. 10 and some others.

Yussuff did not dream of asking anyone else, and had forgotten Mrs. Tacker. When No. 5 came round he was plunged in the deepest of reveries; but she had her eye upon him, and took his arm as the *bâton* began to move. She found him inert. Who is there who has not at least once in a lifetime had a similar experience? Absent-mindedness where there used to be alacrity, politeness instead of devotion; and the worst of it all was, that there was

evidently nothing intentional in his coldness. His attitude was an unconscious one. He would occasionally brace himself up and be attentive to his partner, and then again forget her. Mrs. Tacker sat down and became silent, not for want of words—oh no!—but she was a woman of the world, and she kept the curb on.

No. 10 appeared on the white card before the conductor, and Yussuff eagerly claimed Miss Browne. She was all smiles, and was looking wonderfully beautiful. Yussuff gave himself up to the intoxication of first love. But the dance came to an end all too soon; Miss Browne's next partner came and claimed her, and Yussuff was left in a dream, from which he was roused by a light touch on his arm.

'Thrown over, Prince, and by you!' said Mrs. Tacker. 'Don't apologize. That will only make it worse. Come, let us be friends. I know a quiet corner. Take me there, and let us talk things over. I read your thoughts. How any one with your experience can so wear his heart upon his sleeve is a matter of surprise. You must be very far gone. And poor me! What an odious flirt you are, captivating my youthful fancy and then throwing me over! However, my dear Prince, I am a woman of the world. I don't know if I ever was capable of feeling deeply. At all events, I have given up doing so for a very long time. I shall not be jealous. As I cannot have you at my feet, I should like to keep

you as a friend. I will be a faithful ally. I know my way about among these Americans. You do not know of what use I can be to you—and I will be faithful and true. The next room is often empty. I have been there before—I mean before you came—and I possess information of the greatest importance.'

They went into a small room, in which they were alone. Mrs. Tacker looked at him earnestly and, dropping her voice, so as to be audible only to him, she discoursed with earnestness for nearly a quarter of an hour. When they returned to the ball-room Yussuff was silent ; but it was evident that he was thinking most intensely. By a mutual consent, well understood, though not expressed in words, his remaining engagements with Mrs. Tacker were cancelled. His conduct towards Miss Browne lost a good deal of its *camaraderie*, and was marked with respect, bordering on homage. At the end of the evening he once more encountered Mrs. Tacker, and found himself again in the room in which their former conversation had taken place. The result of this second conference was that he promised to call on her on the following day at an hour when there would be no fear of interruption to the settlement of the terms of their alliance, offensive and defensive.

Next morning, at an early hour, Mrs. Tacker found herself by chance at the home of Mrs. Street-Houston. Mrs. Tacker was talking to her and to Miss Browne.

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Tacker, ‘the Prince is wonderfully civilized, and I believe he will abjure Mahomedanism. They are only allowed to drink champagne. All other wines are forbidden, but he long since emancipated himself from that rule. Some of their customs are very peculiar. I remember when I was in Atticalpoor there was an English lawyer, a Mr. Jones. He fell very much in love with a young lady, but he had the disability of being already married. He became a Mussulman, and took the name of Abdoolah Jones. Well, my dear, Mr. Abdoolah Jones knew the law, and that a Mussulman can have as many wives as he likes, so he married this young lady, and lived as a good Mahomedan, without any danger of a prosecution for bigamy. The new Mrs. Abdoolah Jones lived very happily for a time, but a day came when Mr. Abdoolah Jones got tired of his new toy. By the Mussulman law, a husband has but to say to his wife, ‘Take your best clothes and return to your father’s house,’ and she is thereby divorced. So one fine day the young woman found herself with her best clothes back in her father’s house, and divorced from her Mahomedan husband. After this Mr. Abdoolah Jones gave up Mahomedanism. He returned to Christianity, became again plain Mr. Jones. He and his old wife made it up and lived happily ever after, as models of connubial bliss.’

After a few more tales of sunnier climes, Mrs. Tacker took her departure.

Next morning Yussuff wended his way on foot over the Pont Neuf and along the Boulevard St. Michel—through that *quartier* which has been spoiled, its older inhabitants say, by the so-called improvements of Haussmann. After some scientific navigation, he entered the classic gateway of the Hôtel Bossuet, whose massive iron-barred portals had stood against the Fronde. Here he called on a young duke, whose acquaintance he had made during the polo-match. Everyone staying at the Hôtel Bossuet is an impecunious duke of the *ancien régime*, or a marquis or a priest. He then strolled towards the Hôtel Cluny. He knew that place well—that oasis in the sirocco-swept Paris. There is something infinitely restful and withal pathetic in the garden of Cluny. Outside is the clatter of the Quartier Latin, the tumult of the metropolis, the dust, the glare—the world, the student, and the devil. Here all is quiet, all is calm, all is cool and shaded, and nature is supreme. The grass grows green and uncut, and still moist with but half-dried dew. Where over two feet long, it is lodged like corn in a wet July. Huge branches of ancient trees, untrimmed by any vandal forester, throw a shade as thick as that of a mango grove. From the dust, the glare, the bewilderment of Paris, in a few steps one reaches cool, calm, quiet rest and peacefulness. What would Paris be without Cluny? And Cluny would not be what it is, were it not in the middle of Paris. Yussuff entered and looked into

the museum on his way to the gardens. There he found a lady alone, and this lady was Miss Kitty Browne.

No one knew better than Yussuff that an opportunity once lost may never again present itself. He was soon deep in an interesting review of the marvels of this unique museum, and, unlike many *ciceroni*, he knew what he was talking about. He possessed a vast fund of archæological lore, and Miss Browne became an auditor, a rôle which she did not often assume. He waxed eloquent over the roof of the small chapel, the massive groining of which is supported by one slender central shaft. She admired the idea, as fascinating from its boldness, but took the view that a vast roof without any break to its immensity was more in accordance with the sublimity which is not far from being akin to religious feeling. He asked her if she thought that religious emotions should really be cultivated, and if man's views of the future were to be sentimentalized.

'It depends,' she replied, 'on what we think of the infinite. Man cannot comprehend infinity. When we look at the stars we can believe that some of them are millions and millions of miles away, but none of us can understand the fact that the stellar space goes on for ever, that there is no end to it. We may believe this, but we cannot comprehend it. Man's brain can grasp a certain quantity, but a limit is reached beyond which the

human mind can hold no more. Shall we, then, be content not to comprehend, or shall we let our feeling and sympathies supply our intellectual deficiencies ?' continued Miss Browne.

'I understand your reasoning, though it is rather deep for me,' said he. 'Let us go into the garden. I love this building, but the garden is the gem of the place.'

They were soon seated together under the dense shade of some royal forest trees. A twelve-foot wall shut out the street. Save by themselves, the garden was deserted. Cluny mostly is deserted. They had left no one behind them in the museum or chapel. In the heart of Paris they were alone as if on a desert island.

'What a sweet, restful place !' said she. 'It is as lonesome as the Marble canyon. I shall often come here ; it is delicious.'

'Miss Browne,' said Yussuff, in his musical falsetto voice, 'I am not generally considered to be a coward, and yet I am one. I trembled when I entered the building, and I now fear, with a terrible dread, that I may fail in my only object in life. Miss Browne, I have passed through life carelessly and happily. My ease of mind was due, I acknowledge, in a great degree to insensibility and recklessness. I never experienced a deep feeling. I do not remember ever having done anyone an injury, but for no one have I ever felt the affection which we are told comes to every man once in his life,

and once only. And I thank God that my life has hitherto been without love—that my heart has never before throbbed with a true devotion. I speak not to you of your beauty, though that fascinated me the first instant I saw you. The only love worth a straw is love at first sight. At that instant I knew that my fate was settled—that I had a glimpse of heaven. I know four continents, and after seeing you I declare that there is no other woman who can be called beautiful ; but I know that the flattery which might please an ordinary woman would have little power with you. It is your mind that I love, with its brilliancy, its sparkle, the clearness of your intellect, the beauty of the way in which you regard life, the saintliness of your pure soul which so entrances me. I will be your slave. I will give up my country. I will do what you please. I will buy a ranche in Texas or settle off Fifth Avenue. I come of a family as old as the Guelphs. I am not below the average, mentally or physically. I am not a mere frivolous butterfly, as you might think from my life of the last few weeks. I have power, will, energy, determination, and every faculty of my nature shall be devoted to the one absorbing effort to secure your perfect and complete happiness.'

'Alas!' said she, deeply affected, 'it cannot be. I am so sorry! I like you so much, but not in that way. Last night, at the dance, it flashed on my mind that you might care for me, and as soon as I

saw you here to-day I determined, if I saw a chance, to tell you the true state of my feelings.'

'For God's sake, don't say that!' said Yussuff, turning deadly pale. 'I have been too abrupt. To hope to win a girl like you I should worship you for years, and wait as Jacob waited for Rachel. Forget all that I have said, Miss Browne. Let me commence from this day to try and win your heart. I shall be no importunate suitor; I shall see you as seldom as you wish for a few weeks. Oh, what have I done?' said he, with a tone of agony. 'Rashly impetuous, I have shocked your delicate sensibilities. I will go away for awhile. I will go to the Congo and shoot lions. I will make men talk of me. You will like me no worse for that.'

'No, my friend, it cannot be,' said she.

'Surely,' said Yussuff, 'there cannot be such maddening misery in store for me! Nature itself tells us that attraction must be mutual. The magnet attracts iron, but iron also attracts the magnet. When I felt my whole soul drawn to you, I believed that you must have felt a little of the fiery tumult. But I shall say no more until I come back from Africa.'

'Do not go to Africa,' said she. 'Make up your mind that what you desire cannot be. Forget sentiment, and let me keep a friend for whom I have a very great deal of admiration and regard.'

'It is very little,' said he sadly. 'But I will not give up hope. By time, patience and perseverance

much can be done. Each day since I first met you I have felt that we were becoming better friends. I believed that I was fated to get every day nearer and nearer.'

'And never quite to reach,' said she. 'Prince, I cannot marry you, but I will be an asymptote to you. Excuse the expression, which I am far from using in a frivolous sense. It puts the case as it really stands.'

He felt that she meant him to understand that what he wished for was in the language of science absurd and impossible. He was badly hit—very badly hit—but it behoved him to bear up like a man. He offered her his arm and brought her to the door, and put her into a cab which he hailed. She drove away really grieved. She certainly had refused a prince, and that was some slight consolation. He walked along the Boulevard St. Michel, grinding his teeth. He was not more conceited than other men, which means that he was only about four times as vain as an ordinary woman, and his *amour propre* had sustained a deep wound. Because Miss Browne liked his society, and showed that she considered him an agreeable, cultivated and amusing person, and a desirable partner to play golf and tennis with, he had rashly concluded that she was in love with him. And now all was over.

It was not merely his vanity that was hurt: he had given his whole soul to this girl, and her influence had made him a purer and better man.

Almost unconsciously he found himself at the door of the house where Mrs. Tacker lived in a very comfortable flat. He was expected. Should he call? He felt that anything was better than lonely misery; if his mind could be occupied, he might forget, if only for a moment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SIREN.

MRS. TACKER welcomed him warmly, and issued instructions that she was not at home to anyone; she saw that he was very much upset, and set herself to cheer him up.

‘What has happened to you?’ said she. ‘Have you backed the wrong horse, or have the cards been against you? By the way, I went to help on your case this morning, as I promised last night that I would.’

‘That affair is over,’ said Yussuff. ‘It is a thing of the past.’

‘Oh dear me! have you really been and gone and done it? My poor boy! You look very hard hit. But it could never have been. Pork to pork is their motto, and I heard this morning that Phineas K. Blogg is to be in Paris in a fortnight.’

‘And who in the world is Phineas K. Blogg?’

‘Haven’t you heard of him? I call that unfair,

not telling you everything—you who so evidently are in real earnest. I'm sure you weren't after her money, and she must know that perfectly, for women have instincts, though they do not always trust to them. Well, you must know that in days of old there were two poor Chicago men, named Browne and Blogg. They bought pork and made many dollars. Young Master Blogg and young Miss Browne grew up together, and were meant for each other. The old gentlemen drew up an agreement that if either of the young people declined the marriage, the whole of that individual's property was to go to the other young person. Miss Browne came over to 'do' Europe four years ago, while young Blogg became managing partner of the business, which is an immense one.

'Young Blogg was over here last year. It was his first visit to "Yurup." He is a dreadfully piggy kind of man—talks the harshest of tongues, and brags about his dollars in a most unpleasant style. I did not like him. I hate a man who drinks and chews tobacco, who goes boating in a frock-coat, tall hat, and black trousers, and spits in the fire-place. I don't think Miss Browne cares for him, but I am certain she will marry him. She is so proud of her money—and really, who could blame her? She is rich, she is independent, she is her own mistress, lives where she likes, does as she likes, has every enjoyment in the world; whereas, if she refused Mr. Blogg she would have nothing; and

even if she married a rich man, she would have to ask him for money every time she wanted to buy a little chewing-gum. She will marry Blogg, and small blame to her. They will probably be divorced a few months after. That's an easy matter in the States, and the old gentlemen made no provision against that result. They will keep the money, and obtain renewed freedom. That's her game, and quite right, too.'

Yussuff winced at this information.

'I will cure you of your attack,' said Mrs. Tacker. 'I shall be your doctor. Now for your first dose.' She produced a bottle with a wire-netting. 'Our old acquaintance No. 1,' said she. 'It is the only brand fit to drink. Let me fill it out for you, *jusque au joli*.' She then produced a syphon, and dropped in two large lumps of ice. To keep him company, she took a little herself—a very little indeed, for, to do her justice, absorption was not one of Mrs. Tacker's vices. She could temulate at times, but she did not do so habitually. 'Drink, pretty creature, drink!' said she encouragingly.

The medicine was dreadfully strong, and Yussuff soon felt slightly better.

'Now,' said the doctor, feeling the patient's pulse, 'we shall recommend a change of scene for a few hours—a drive into the country, a good dinner, fresh air, and pleasant society. Boulanger and his stable companion are eating their heads off. Fetch

them here in a quarter of an hour, and take me for a drive to Conflans.'

Yussuff walked to his stables as she went to change her dress. He soon returned with his two blacks and a groom. She came down, exquisitely dressed, and looking her very best; but he scarcely saw her. Before long they were in what might almost be called the country—at a charming little village, so secluded and so rural that it might have been in Navarre, and which owned a little *auberge* which, though one never would have expected it, possessed a superb cook and an unsurpassed stock of wines. Mrs. Tacker had heard of this place from her friend the Duchess of L——, and had studied its position on the map before starting.

The horses were put up in stables far better than would have been expected from the look of the house, and a walk of exploration got through the time while dinner was being prepared. It was excellent. Yussuff was very quiet; Mrs. Tacker talked herself into high spirits, but she was not boisterous. Like many people who cannot sing, she had a most musical conversational voice, and she had a great deal of both wit and humour. She dilated on the Americans, and her imitations were comic in the extreme. Yussuff suddenly found himself laughing until the tears came into his eyes. When dinner was over she sat back in a luxurious armchair, her feet on another, a two-franc cigar

between her lips, while she enjoyed the fragrant coffee such as can only be obtained in France. She was perfectly happy, for she was essentially a Bohemian. Of old she had loved to sit thus on a terraced roof late into the balmy tropical night. She looked at Yussuff, and hummed almost inaudibly to herself the old extravaganza jingle :

‘ He may wriggle, he may struggle,
But I’ve got him in my eye.’

She suggested cards as the best prescription to obtain peace of mind for her patient. They played *écarté* for an hour, and Mrs. Tacker rose a winner of thirteen hundred francs. As they drove home she was in tremendous spirits. Yussuff, after leaving her at her house, went on to a club, where he met Dunne. He played baccarat, lost eight thousand francs, and then won it all back and four thousand more, drank twice as much as he usually did, went home in a fever, and dreamt that he was vainly trying to reach Miss Browne across a river of pigs, on whose backs walked a hideous Chicago man, with a chin tuft.

Next morning he awoke to misery. A note awaited him.

‘ DEAR PATIENT,’ it commenced, ‘ I am sure you are knocked up this morning. Come and breakfast with me. If anyone in the world can get you into a state of moderate comfort, I can. I shall expect

you at eleven o'clock, and I have important news for you.

‘Yours always,
‘C. TACKER.’

He yielded to the force of circumstances, and drifted once more into the silken meshes spread for him. It is not always in vain that the net is set in sight of the bird. Mrs. Tacker had already seen a certain dame known as the ‘*Courrier de Paris*.’ This lady was one of those whom wise persons make use of to save the cost of advertisements. In the strictest confidence Mrs. Gup was told that the Prince wished to marry Miss Browne, and that Mrs. Tacker was exerting herself to the utmost to effect that desired result; that she was laying all sorts of plans to bring them together; that she really pitied the poor Prince, who was so anxious that he called on her three times a day to get advice. When she appeared on Yussuff’s mail phaeton in the Bois, all Paris and his wife knew that she was there as Hymen’s negotiator, and that she, whose spinsterhood was of the past, was using all her skill and good-nature to secure the marriage of a spinster of the present. All this accounted satisfactorily for the intimacy between her and Yussuff.

His cure was, however, slow. She once ventured to speak of Miss Browne as Mrs. Blogg, but she regretted having done so. Gradually she felt that

her influence was beginning to make itself felt. She planned a dinner in a gourmands' café beyond the water, to be followed by a first night at the Odéon, to wind up with a ball which was to be the event of the season. They had an excellent dinner in a *cabinet particulier*. The course of treatment had its effect. Richard was not quite 'himself again,' but was 'getting on' that way. He had noticed her gowns once or twice lately. She was silent at times and thoughtful. Now and then she for a moment seemed as if she was afraid of him. She told him many episodes of her early youth, and then she spoke of the great mistake of her life—how, married to a man whom she despised, all future happiness became impossible.

'Alas! what I might have been! But the die is cast,' said she. 'We are what others have made us, and what we have made of ourselves. But there is one blessing: we have got rid of cant. If I were Mrs. Ebbsmith I would never have snatched the book from the burning. You pity yourself; but think from what you have been saved. Could you, who have drunk deep of the wine of life, sit down to domestic milk and water with Kitty Browne? Could you bear to have the Reverend Jeremiah Smallpiece twang forth his nasal platitudes through dinner and evening, while you could not call your house your own? You think you would have been converted by your pretty prude. *You* converted! for three days, yes; for a week, no. Have you

tested yourself as to whether you could stand such a life? Did you try to give up anything? Did you stop gambling? Did you give up your other *liaison*, for I am sure you have one?' said she, with a blaze of jealous fury. 'No, no; such as you are you will always be; such as you cannot change. And think how little she could love you. That delicate, blue-eyed, passionless thing, what can she know about love? She would have shrunk from your impetuosity. You would have been tired of her in a couple of months; you want one who can love with a passion as warm and all-consuming as your own.'

They started on their round of amusements. Every moment Mrs. Tacker became more and more enamoured, and as the evening wore on, she felt that she was winning. Hope of victory quickened the zest of pursuit, and she felt like an escalading column as the hour of attack draws nigh, ready to do anything or dare anything to secure success.

Next morning Yussuff was preparing to go out when a sable servitor told him a sahib wished to see him. The visitor was shown in, and proved to be Mrs. Tacker, in a knickerbocker costume, and wearing a tiny moustache. She looked like an operatic page-boy, and a very pretty one too.

Yussuff sprang up to welcome her. Her bright eyes danced with fun. She attempted a pirouette, but she tripped in a tiger-skin and fell, her head striking on a corner of the piano. She swooned. Much alarmed, Yussuff raised her. She was a long

time coming round, and he was beginning to become seriously uneasy, when she opened her beautiful eyes, gazed at him, and whispered, 'Kiss me.'

He stooped his head, and received a long, sweet, lingering, thrilling, clinging kiss. She then swooned once more, but after awhile became herself again, but very gradually.

'Well,' said she, 'rational dress is a deal better than a roll of carpets, any way. I've come to take you away on a bike. Your machine is below; I bought it for you with that money you lost to me at *écarté*. I am good for a ninety-mile run. I will show you the way—first to a place I know of where we can get a good breakfast, then we shall run to Rheims, and then *vogue la galère*.'

She walked out of the house, and sprang on her bicycle, to all appearances a remarkably handsome young man with a beautiful moustache and a dandified dress. Only the feet were too small. She had engulfed her hands in huge buckskin gloves; but nothing would persuade her to wear boots too large.

'I got this moustache,' said she, 'when riding in rural parts of England. Some of the landladies of country inns would not admit me without a skirt—I hate to mix my costumes, so I never carried one. I just mounted a moustache instead; and the landladies looked at me sometimes, I can tell you, with a very great amount of favour indeed. Now for our breakfast, then we shall ride to the monkey tope, and then for Rheims.'

Mrs. Tacker had conquered, and now changed her tactics. By the time they reached Rheims she had become almost coy. She looked well on a bicycle; she had a superb figure, although her waist was twenty-five inches—an inch or two more than Yussuff's. Success made her eyes still brighter, the exercise gave her perhaps a shade too much colour, but that suited her style. She would not allow of a reviver oftener than once in every twenty miles, and when the allotted space had been covered she joined in the refreshment with an unaffectedness which was very ingratiating. Both of them remembered the trip as one of the most pleasant days of their lives.

In her capacity of matrimonial agent to promote the marriage of Miss Browne, Mrs. Tacker was now seen about very much with Yussuff; it was rumoured that she hoped to convert him from Mohamedanism. But an interruption came to this pleasant friendship. An aunt of Mrs. Tacker, living in Clapham, became seriously ill. With this lady, who possessed many goods and chattels and shares and bonds, she had always been on very good terms, and now received information that the patient eagerly desired her presence. She wanted somebody to cheer her up, she said, so Mrs. Tacker had to go. With many mutual protestations of regard, she and Yussuff parted, he promising to cross over to London if the aunt's illness should cause his dear friend to remain in England for a lengthened period.

On the morning of her departure Mrs. Tacker sat in her drawing-room. A shrewd observer could have guessed that she was expecting someone to call by appointment. The door opened, and Mr. Dunne was announced.

‘Ah,’ said she, extending her hand, ‘it is so good of you to come, and I am so glad to meet you. Whom do I see to-day, Valentine or Orson?’

‘To be Orson is my destiny,’ said Dunne.

‘To all except to me. But why do you assume these brusque manners—you who can be so different?’

‘Well, my fate was for many years cast among the hardest and the coarsest of men—among miners, cowboys, backwoodsmen, the roughest of the rough, but very honest and very true, most of them. Now, my theory is, that if a round man finds himself in a square hole, he ought to develop angles.’

‘Ah,’ said Mrs. Tacker. ‘It seems as if you had completely forgotten me and those past days, so few, and so sweet.’

‘You I shall never forget; but days like those are not meant to endure for ever.’

‘You have consoled yourself,’ said she.

‘And you also.’

‘Yes; but why should you and I not still be friends? You know what the song says:

“You should never be off with the old love
Until you’re well on with the new.”

I have not forgotten,’ continued she, ‘those old

days when you first came to Paris, with all the dash, vigour, and romantic glamour of the Wild West. Can you wonder if my young heart was entranced? Can you wonder if I grieve that you have so completely abandoned me? Why is it that I care for the Prince—why? It is because in his verve, his brilliancy, and his admiration for myself, he so much resembles you as you were when I first knew you. And listen to me,’ continued she. ‘Come closer—closer still; let me whisper it in your ear. I am the most constant of women. Any person can be faithful to one; that is a trifle. But to be a true friend to two—that is real constancy’; and she stretched her hands towards him.

‘No, no,’ said Dunne; ‘passion is not a phoenix; it cannot rise again from its own dead ashes.’

‘Is it true that you love that simpering child—the financier’s daughter?’

‘It is true,’ said Dunne.

‘And you are going to marry and settle down to your bourse, and your cards, and your *gourmandise*, while your shrinking violet develops into a gorgeous passion-flower and has a fresh lover each season.’

‘You know nothing of what a good woman is. Were you ever innocent?’

‘I suppose I must have been some time or other,’ said she. ‘Then we must be only friends.’

‘Only friends, and very good friends too.’

‘And I shall see you across a room twice in a year. I guessed you had something matrimonial on hand

directly you began to keep so very far distant from me. But still we are real friends.'

'Real friends.'

'Then from a friend I can ask that which from a lover I could never accept. A rich aunt of mine is very ill in Clapham, and wants me to go over. You know my usual habits, and that my allowance is always overdrawn. Now, I cannot start unless I get two hundred pounds by hook or crook.'

'By rare good fortune,' said Dunne, 'I have more than that sum in my pocket. I intended to have gone on and paid a man, but I can do that tomorrow.'

Mrs. Tacker thanked him with many grateful words, and he left. She did not seem to take at all deeply to heart the failure of her love-making. All flirting had been over between her and Dunne for a very long time. Her recent behaviour was merely a way she had. She lived through a succession of *grandes passions*, but these by no means prevented her from feeling very much in love with any other man with whom she might be in a position of temporary adjacency.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GAMBLE.

YUSSUFF was a weak man, in so much as he yielded to the overpowering influence of a habit. He certainly missed the agreeable society of Mrs. Tacker for a day or two. Then he encountered the mousquetaires. He met them with pleasure. He was getting a little weary of the Faubourg St. Honoré, and these three, although they had very good houses open to them, had yet a distinct flavour of the Latin Quarter. He dined with Dunne frequently, and always had a turn at *écarté* afterwards.

‘Ill fared it then with Roderick Dunne,’ for Yussuff won steadily. Dunne could not make this out at all. The cards did not run so very one-sided, but for a mere beginner Yussuff’s play was a marvel. At times the unpleasant thought would intrude that Yussuff was the better player, but consideration convinced him that such a thing was impossible. Dunne worked out each game afterwards, and often remained up until daylight playing the cards as they had turned up. His play seemed always faultless, but some unlucky card, often a small one, constantly upset his best calculations.

One evening, after his usual set-to with Yussuff, the latter went away. A letter was brought in with the American post-mark. Dunne took it up and tore it open eagerly. He became deadly pale, stood

up, and walked up and down the room two or three times. He then took his hat and gloves, and, thinking intensely, walked downstairs and out of doors until he came to a restaurant in a secluded street. Here he found a quiet corner, where he might almost consider himself in solitude. He ordered a small bottle of Cliquot. After a couple of glasses the colour returned to his cheeks. The walk had relieved his brain of the feeling of numbness which had at first followed the reading of the letter. He took it out and proceeded to read it again. Not that such a process was necessary. The words were burned into his brain, and no one knew the full meaning of the news better than he did.

The mine which he owned was failing; the weekly output had decreased ninety per cent., and the changes in the nature of the surrounding rock, and the appearance of the lode, made it quite likely that this source of revenue was at an end. Of all speculations, mining is the most uncertain. None knew that better than he did, and now absolute ruin stared him in the face—and all through his own folly. The collapse of a lode was an event for which any man of sense ought to have been prepared, though, in this case, certain indications on which he, with a full trust in his own scientific knowledge, relied seemed to indicate that his mine was safe for twenty years at least. Still, there is no absolute certainty about mining, and he had known this well. He had made his pile three years before.

He had put together six hundred thousand dollars, and had then made up his mind that even if he never got another cent, he had enough to live upon happily for the rest of his existence. A part of his previous life had been a very hard one. Now that he had a chance of luxury, pleasure, and happiness, having enough to get everything he wanted, why should he go piling up dollars which he could never use? What good were his extra millions to Vanderbilt? What benefit were piles of gold to Jay Gould, pale, gloomy, unhappy, and joyless, on his captain's biscuit and glass of cold water? Over half a million all is vanity, so Dunne divided his pile into three parts and put each portion into a sound investment: one into a railway, one into a cable, and one into the English funds. He then started for Paris, to live happily ever afterwards. He had all the delights of extravagance, with the super-added zest of security in his own prudence.

'Yes, sir,' said he, addressing himself during his first days in Paris, 'other men have come to grief, but you cannot. The oil-well of Gilead P Beck gave out, but the yield of English consols cannot cease. Jabez went smash—he speculated; I don't speculate. The landed interest may go to the bad—I have no cultivated land; I keep on the mine as an additional income. Rich and safe, rich and safe,' said he, as he basked in the delights of Paris.

And his wealth was not all spent in dissipation. Occasionally he treated himself to the luxury of

doing a generous action ; he would save a family from threatened starvation by the gift of a few Napoleons. He would search out an artist in despair, and, buying a picture for a few hundred francs, tide over the sickness of a child, or in some way give that assistance which, received at the right time, may prove the turning-point in a career.

And even in his gifts his money was not fooled away. He sought those who were deserving ; his aid was judiciously given. No one imposed upon him. He smiled upon himself, as the shrewd, good-hearted, but not soft-headed, man of the world. He despised those who had money and lost it. He betted on races for a time, but not rashly ; he kept most careful books of his transactions. At starting he thought he knew all about a horse. He studied the subject intensely ; he cultivated the society of turfites. At the end of a year he had lost over four thousand pounds sterling. He had begun to like the gambling of the turf—he felt all the gambler's excitement. The game was worth the candle, as far as mere amusement went. His mine was bringing in nine thousand pounds a year.

After totalling up his turf transactions, he had a big think ; he asked himself if he had lost through any fault of his own. Then his clear business mind saw that a backer cannot win in the long-run from the ring, any more than a gambler at Monte Carlo can win from the table. The table makes the rules of the game so as to leave a slight chance in its own

favour ; the ring makes the odds so as to be to its own advantage. Common-sense decided that he could not win on the turf, so he gave up racing, though not without a strong effort. He enjoyed the sport thoroughly. It brought him in contact with a number of titled people, whom he dearly liked to meet ; and there can be no doubt that he loved a gamble. However, as he told himself, his iron will prevailed : he had power to resist temptation. This giving up racing made him one of the happiest of men ; he was proud of himself. The luxuries of Paris had not lessened any of his old shrewd business powers or his native strength of character. ' Rich and safe ; rich and safe.'

About this time several financial crashes occurred among men whom he knew. He pitied them a little, contemptuously, and reflected with satisfaction on his own security.

For awhile he spent the whole of his time in amusement, such as Paris supplies in profusion ; but he soon began to find a need of something to occupy his mind. To enjoy idleness a man must have been born to it. It may be taken as a postulate that no man can spend a year of idleness with satisfaction to himself and others, and without injury to himself or to anyone else, unless he has been brought up to idleness from his earliest years. Many men who become idle after a hard-working life take to drink, particularly those whose earlier labours have been more or less of a manual nature, and, most of all,

those whose career has been liable to the excitement of sudden losses, and equally sudden fortunes, as in mining. This, however, was altogether contrary to Dunne's disposition. He had mixed a good deal with a rather Bohemian lot, including many residents in the Latin Quarter, and he now began to make his way into rather good sets among his fellow country people. Among them the echo of Wall Street was heard, all across the 'roaring forties.' At that time French *rentes* gave an eighth more than consols: Dunne transferred his two hundred thousand dollars from the English to the French funds.

About this time, with all Paris he went to the seaside. He soon got tired of this phase of French society: it had all the frivolity of Paris, without the solidity of the capital, so he took a run to London, and there met an old friend who had made his pile and settled in England.

This man asked him to lunch at his club, which was nearly empty. While waiting for lunch he showed Dunne accounts which he had had from two stock-brokers, giving him a combined profit of six hundred and eighty-two pounds on a fortnight's transactions. At lunch, and during a game of billiards, with electric marking, the conversation of Dunne's friend was all of the Stock Exchange.

Now, there is no way perhaps in which people become so confidential as while playing billiards without a marker.

‘There is no greater folly,’ said this friend, ‘than for a man like you or me, who has made his pile, to risk it all on the Stock Exchange. But what I say is, take a certain sum—a certain number of thousand pounds—put that on one side to play with. I can trust my own strength of resolution so far that I know if I lost every penny of that sum I would stop at once, and nothing could possibly tempt me to encroach on the main body of my fortune, which would remain intact. But I don’t lose. I know the world; my judgment has been trained by long experience, gained in hardship and poverty, and I find I can have all the pleasing excitement of a gamble, and make money into the bargain. As a matter of fact I have made money, and shall continue to make money. When you dine with me to-morrow I will show you the accounts of my operations. It is all nonsense for a man like you or me to settle down to do nothing; we simply can’t remain idle. Why, I have no appetite for my dinner if I have not done something, or had excitement of some kind during the day. It’s the same way with all human beings; it’s the same way with women: that is what makes them go mad about shopping and dress, about society, and all kinds of nonsense. Instinct impels them to some occupation, and they have no other outlets for their energies.’

There were many more conversations of this kind, which led Dunne into a good deal of thinking after his return to Paris. The Stock Exchange was not

like the turf. Here he had not as his sole opponents men who made the odds in their favour. Among men who dabbled in stocks there might be some smarter and better trained than himself. But most assuredly there were thousands much less acute than he; there were no bookmakers to fight, no banker who must eventually conquer. There might be a ring, but he might be of it. His horse-racing had kept his mind constantly on the stretch. It had satisfied his craving for occupation. Now that he had given it up, a void remained, and ennui began to envelop him. His life was empty, and he could not take a real interest in the banalities of the hour. Then he went to the Bourse; he sought the society of those who dealt in stocks. He invested, and sold out at a profit. The few francs he thus obtained were sweeter far than the money which came in without exertion. He was soon in the vortex, but he kept his head level. He had one-third of his fortune—two hundred thousand dollars—in Paris, and that he set aside to play with: this kept him fully employed. He who has never had to think incessantly on the fluctuations of the share list has never known what it is to possess an engrossing occupation. And he made money. He never plunged—he always sold out for a certain small gain rather than hold on for a doubtful big haul; and his sweetest hours were spent over the ledger which contained the record of his lucky transactions. Then he began baccarat. He only ventured

on the cards what he had won on the Bourse, so he still remained safe.

His strong gambling instinct led him to baccarat, but his reason warned him against it. The element of chance was too much. What he sighed for was a game in which he might pit his brain against a nearly equal intellect, and by coolness, courage, and intense study of his subject, he might play and win, and by winning gain money. A game for honour had no attractions for him. He found what he wanted in *écarté*.

He studied the game intently. He knew that a Frenchman can give any ordinary Englishman a point in *écarté* and beat him. He read every book on the subject. He played games by himself for hours. He employed a broken-down gambler to play with him, and paid him to explain each hand. He began to play at clubs; he found he could hold his own. He was always cool, he studied each man's play, and soon became known as a dangerous antagonist. The first day he played with Yussuff it was only to keep up his habit of playing for at least an hour each day to keep his memory in exercise.

He had been successful in everything, and he attributed all his success to his own smartness and his self-restraint. He saw men gambling when more than half intoxicated. He saw gay bankers spending their nights in riotous dissipation.

'How can these men,' said he to himself, 'have

the cool head and clear judgment next morning which never deserts me ?’

His self-confidence grew. He measured himself against people who had made millions by gambling, and he found himself their superior. He would not plunge, but it pleased him to think that he could do so successfully if he pleased. He never boasted, and consequently his good opinion of himself, having no outlet, inflated him the more. All this time his expenditure was rapidly expanding. Then a great exhibition was coming on in Chicago—here was a chance of a fortune. He wrote to a lawyer, a friend of his, to buy up every acre of land about Chicago which could be got as far as three hundred thousand dollars could go. This land for building purposes would in a few years sell for a fabulous price. But would he sell? When the time came he would decide. Thoughts would pass through his mind of holding on, and building the houses himself; he would become an American Duke of Westminster, or of Bedford, and then he would come to London as an American millionaire, go into politics, buy a newspaper to help a party, and become an English peer. Yes, that Chicago land was a solid stroke of luck.

Then Dunne fell desperately in love with the daughter of a financier, but we have not room for his romance in this short history. Suffice it to say that the father of the lady approved of Mr. Dunne, and gave him the benefit of his advice about many

investments. He was an operator of the bold and brilliant order, and derived incalculable benefit from collaboration with the cool, calculating American.

Then he met Yussuff; he liked him, he played *écarté* with him, first for mere amusement, and then to win back what he had lost. Then came a time when he wondered how he could have such a run of ill luck. From day to day the stakes went up, no one could exactly tell how. The play became a struggle for mastery. The old fierce gambling spirit began to regain its ascendancy. Dunne had not always been the wealthy model of law-abiding respectability whom we have seen in Paris. He had a past which made it pleasant to live out of the States for a time. Then the day came when he won heavily from Yussuff. This put him in a fever: he saw that his run of bad luck was over, he panted for revenge; but Yussuff stayed away, first pursuing Miss Browne, and then pursued by Mrs. Tacker. On the departure of the latter for England the play recommenced with varying fortunes, when bad news came for Dunne.

He had not seen much of his fellow-citizens for some time, when one evening he turned into the Café Américain. Here he heard that the value of land was rapidly going down in Chicago. He immediately wrote to his lawyer to sell out at once. His commercial instinct told him that if land once began falling it would go lower still. Next day he sent two cablegrams to Chicago. A few days after-

wards he listened to a well-known man holding forth on the subject.

‘Ya’as,’ said this plutocrat, ‘I bought Chicago land on the boom, and now those lots I paid 1,500 dollars each for are not worth 1,500 cents apiece. At present they are worth nothing, so I am going to hold on to them. In fact, I have to hold on, as no one would take them off my hands even as a gift.’

Dunne immediately cabled to his lawyer to raise anything he could on these land lots by mortgage. He received no reply. He cabled to another friend of his, paying for a reply. He received an answer saying that his lawyer had used his power of attorney to get possession of all his money in the railway and the cable, and had ‘skipped,’ taking the title-deeds of the building blocks with him. Dunne shuddered at the news. The dreadful part was that he now saw that the boom in Chicago could not have lasted. Had he not seen exactly similar results in all parts of the world? The merest exercise of common-sense ought to have saved him. However, one must breakfast under any circumstances. He turned into a *café*, sat down to a comfortable *déjeuner*, and sent to the next kiosk for a financial paper. He opened it, and there saw ‘Failure of the Dollbys.’ He could not believe his eyes. Why, they were as good as the Bank of England—as good as the Rothschilds. He hurriedly left his untasted breakfast, and walked briskly to a

newspaper kiosk. He bought half a dozen other papers. It was only too true. He jumped into a cab and drove towards the Bourse. The scene he witnessed on the steps of that building showed that something frightful had happened. Not since 'Black Monday' had there been such a smash. No one could tell what would follow. The immediate cause of this failure was a revolution in a South American State. The Dollbys had bolstered up the Government, and their dealings with it were immense. There had been a rebellion, which became a revolution, and the new Dictator determined to start fair by repudiating all debts contracted before his seizure of the supreme power. Now, by this time the whole of Dunne's two hundred thousand dollars in Paris were invested in the securities of this South American State, which had paid a very high interest for loans.

He went with all speed to see his prospective father-in-law. This astute gentleman had unloaded South Americans only a few hours before the crash. He consoled Dunne by telling him that the new Dictator would not last; that the old Government would be restored, and his bonds would again become valuable. Now, however, he could not have got a five-franc piece for his two hundred thousand dollars of stock, and at the very best they would be worth nothing for years to come. Dunne was also informed that the financier's daughter, for whom he felt an absorbing affection, was lying on

what might be her death-bed ; she was suffering from pneumonia, following the *grippe*, and her condition was a most dangerous one. He said nothing about his other losses, as he knew only too well the change which would occur in the demeanour of the financier if his total collapse were known. The crash was terrific. The best houses came tumbling down in all directions ; thousands of poor investors lost their all.

Again Dunne had to confess that it was all his own fault. What sane man could expect to get five per cent. and be sure of his principal ? Yet he had been no more a fool than hundreds of others, shrewd men who had been trained in finance all their working lives. It was the name of Dollbys that had led them into the pitfall. But yesterday the firm of Dollbys might have stood against the world. A few hours before and he would have trusted them as much as the Bank of England ; so would anyone else. After all, he had only lost his money as many another fool had done, but he ought to have known better. He was not one of those widows, or parsons, or retired officers, who lose because they know nothing about business. He was not one of those who, born to great wealth, squander it, not knowing its value. By hard work and good luck he had raised himself to affluence. His life had lain before him one long primrose path, and now through his own insane folly he had nothing left but his mine. If that were to be his sole dependence he ought to be on the

spot. Yes, he thought with a groan, he would have to leave Paris and go back again to the mud and mire and savagery of mining life. Could he endure the toil and worry of the old existence? He felt that he must—he would work the mine for five years, living on fifty dollars a month. Then he would sell the mine. He would come straight back to Paris, and his pile would go into the English funds. Two and three-quarters per cent. ! Ah! if he only could get a chance to strangle that statesman who abolished the sweet simplicity of the three per cents, he might bring back two hundred thousand dollars—five thousand five hundred dollars a year. Only five thousand, as interest will drop a quarter ! Well, he could live very comfortably on that income. But Marie—would she wait for him? Would her financier father wait? All this was very bitter ; but back he must go. The mine now was his only resource. He wanted something to change his ideas. He went over to the Latin Quarter, met the three mousquetaires, and had a very jovial evening. He left them near the Pont Neuf and walked home to cool his fevered brow.

He remembered that he was to play *écarté* with Yussuff the following evening. Almost in spite of himself, every game he had ever played with Yussuff became re-enacted before his mind's eye. The combinations first appeared singly, and then in groups. These groups began to present a certain order in their permutations. He began to see Yussuff's

system of play. At first the idea gleamed upon him as light might have dawned on Sir Isaac Newton when he began to see that the volumes of such apparently unconnected solids as a cone, a paraboloid of revolution, and a sphere, are in the proportion two, three, four.

He hurried home, and for two hours replayed game after game which he had had with Yussuff. He had a wonderful memory. Every moment convinced him more and more that he was on the right track. At the end he stood up, and walked towards a trough filled with a transparent liquid, into which he flung the cards. In a few moments they had vanished, dissolved in the fluid. This was an invention of his in which he had succeeded. It was an acid which would dissolve everything, except the material in which it was now contained.

Next evening he and Yussuff dined together at a *café*, and then proceeded to their usual game of cards. Dunne won again and again. At the end of the hour's play he had won five thousand francs.

Yussuff went off in a hurry to some entertainment, and left Dunne in a glow of triumph. Then came the letter alluded to some time ago, announcing that his mine had almost failed, and that already its output was very much less than its expenses. He now sat in the corner of the *café* a ruined man. Stocks, land, mine, all worthless. Adieu, Paris; good-bye to the girl he loved! Back to the old grind, with-

out the old pluck to meet it. He felt that he had become unfitted for toilsome labour by his years of luxury.

The outlook was very bitter. It was now come to this, that his only hope of getting money was from Yussuff at cards. He must have capital to take back to the States. He had got out of the mud of poverty formerly by a stroke of pure luck ; but could he rely on similar good fortune a second time ? He knew that for one such case of success there are ten thousand men who, starting without capital, remain miserable hacks until the end of their lives. Dunne made up his mind that he would win ten thousand pounds, and then go to his mine. Yes, with ten thousand he could either work up his mine into good order again, or start a new one. He might gain that sum in ten days ; indeed, half of it would be only getting back his own again. By that time Marie would have recovered. Yes, he would propose and be accepted. He would explain to her father that he was going to the States for a time. At all events, he would go away an engaged man, and then he must trust to hard work, business faculties, and chance. Bad fortune could not pursue him for ever. He returned to his rooms, and commenced playing the games of the previous night over and over again.

Next day he went out for his mid-day breakfast, and took his way to Athos's favourite *café*. He found him there, and soon got full details as to the

catastrophe which had overtaken European and American finance.

‘I thought for a time that our friend the Prince had been badly hit,’ said Athos. ‘He came two days ago and drew out every *centime* he had lying to his credit—over three millions and a half. He is either smashed up or he is going back to his own country, or, more likely still, he is going to elope with someone, with whom he is about to fly to a new quarter of the world.’

Just then in walked Aramis, accompanied by a superbly dressed young gentleman, with very handsome rings.

‘And so,’ said Aramis, ‘we lose our Prince. Well, he is a good fellow, and I am sorry he is going. Oh, these women! these women!’

‘Why,’ said Athos, ‘is that his reason of departure?’

‘Yes,’ said Aramis; ‘I met him half an hour ago, and he told me Madam Tacker begs of him to go over to London. Her aunt has died, and left her a large fortune, which needs looking after, and she wants Yussuff’s aid as a good business man. And a good business man he is, without doubt.’

‘He a business man?’ said Dunne; ‘I would never have thought so.’

‘That is because you have not observed him with sufficient closeness,’ said Aramis. ‘He spends freely when necessary, but he always gets value for his money. He is about the only man in Paris who

has gained by the late crash. I have been for some time thinking he is not the unsophisticated being we assumed. You have what you call your heathen Chinees, but I question if your wily Hindoo would not give him half a stone and a beating. I do not blame him. It is one man's wit against another's. He is a good fellow, all the same; and he has done a very clever stroke of business.'

'Really,' said Athos; 'how is that?'

'Well,' said Aramis, 'I had better leave D'Arblay to tell that story himself.'

'Well,' said the new-comer, 'Mahomed Rassoul Khan, the old gentleman with the enormous beard, whom we have all seen everywhere, got dreadfully hard hit at baccarat, and made a call on the Oriental's treasury. These fellows heap jewels on their wives, who act as a kind of bank, keeping these hoards safely, but yielding them up again to their lords and masters when necessity calls. All these precious stones are merely so much money invested. Our Khan had to sell off all his wives' gew-gaws. Now, there is one lady who rules in his house; by all accounts she is a terrible woman, who has murdered half a dozen of her rivals. She insisted that she should manage the whole sale, and the Khan, whom she completely rules, had to agree to all her proposals. Our chief and I went to make the bargain, and an extraordinary one it was. We were admitted into half of a very handsomely furnished room. I say half, as across the middle, as well as we could judge,

was a curtain, which an interpreter whom we brought with us called a *purdah*. Behind this curtain we heard a voice. It was clear and musical, but with more of command in it than any colonel of cuirassiers ever possessed—sharp, clear, decisive, and at times with something terrible in it. Orders were given, and trembling voices were occasionally heard in reply. Now a totally unexpected difficulty began to be felt. This lady is of a very low origin, commanding by pure force of character, and, we were informed, came from Munjarabad, wherever that may be. She only spoke her native language, a difficult *patois* of Canarese, which is a totally different language from the Hindostani which our interpreter spoke. We were thus compelled to a double or treble interpretation. Those ladies beyond the curtain who spoke her language could only speak a Hindostani which could not be understood by our man. The ruling lady lost her temper, and no business was done that day. I was sent round Paris to find a new interpreter, but failed. One learned body after another told me of Persian scholars, of men who knew the languages of Dardestan, of Thibet, of the Khirghiz, and of the Turkomans, but said there was no man in Paris who understood Canarese. I met Aramis here, who told me of the prince's two servants, who spoke some barbarian language. I asked the Prince about them, and he at once said they spoke the language of the terrible lady. But they could not speak French or Hindostani. He then, in the spirit of adventure,

as he said, offered to act as interpreter himself. We were delighted. He came with us next day, and began a most fluent conversation through the curtain with the great lady. Conversation of a most animated nature now went on for more than a couple of hours. We must have been there in all for three hours or so. When we left Yussuff informed us that a serious hitch had occurred in the transaction. The great lady would under no circumstances consent to part with the jewels permanently. What she insisted on was, full price for the gems, and power of redemption, the agreement to be drawn up on stamped paper, which, strange to say, she knew all about. We returned next day and went through another three hours' palaver. The ornaments were all passed out under the purdah, and the price asked, three millions and a quarter, was a very low one. Power of redemption meant that we were to act as pawnbrokers, and pawnbrokers estimate that the risks of their business do not admit of advancing more than a third of the value of an article. Again, we might have been compelled to keep those gems on hand for years and years, as so much capital lying dead. We declined the transaction. Fancy my astonishment this morning, on meeting our former interpreter, to be told by him that he had heard from one of the armed guardians of the ladies that Yussuff had completed the transaction on his own account, and purchased the whole lot for two hundred thousand less than they were offered to us for. This

leaves him half a million profit on the transaction.'

'See, there,' said Aramis, 'he had your opinion as experts on their value. He can now borrow on the *parure* to within two hundred thousand of its full value, and thus have his ready money as he was before, with three hundred thousand as a clear profit. He is a very clever fellow, and knows his way about. At the same time, you have no fault to find with him; you had the offer and you refused it. You had then no more to do with the matter, and it was open to any other person to do what he pleased in the business.'

'Quite true,' said D'Arblay; 'we at first felt aggrieved, but our chief said after awhile that it was a dog-in-the-manger feeling. The Prince got his chance and he took it.'

'And he will now borrow on his diamonds, and replace his money with us to-morrow,' said Athos, who kept no business confidences among his own particular friends. 'Bravo, Prince!'

'He has asked us all to dine with him this evening,' said Aramis. 'He told me to ask any of you I saw, and he has also written notes to your rooms; Estelle is coming. The Café Rococo, eight o'clock. A great friend of his, one Gunnis Sing, is to be in Paris in a few days. *Au revoir*—eight o'clock.'

They separated. Dunne was at his wits' end. Here was Yussuff about to depart for England. He

might come back, but Dunne could not wait for his return. His mine must be seen to at once. He called at the house of the financier, and was told that his lady-love was out of danger, but would not be up for three weeks at least.

‘I cannot wait,’ said he; ‘I must write.’

Then he went to a notary, and arranged for the sale of his furniture. He was to leave his rooms in four days. On the value of his property he received an advance of ten thousand francs. He then proceeded to a bank where he kept a balance and drew it all out. He counted up what he had won the previous night. In all he had nearly nineteen hundred pounds, besides loose cash. Of these he took one hundred in sovereigns, and placed them in an old miner’s belt; twenty-six ounces of gold. He emptied out a desk of papers, and burned all, and then started out to find Yussuff.

He soon joined him, and thanked him for, and accepted, his invitation for the evening. When near his own rooms he proposed a glass of absinthe in advance of the usual hour. Yussuff agreed.

‘And how about our game?’ said Dunne, as they sipped the *liqueur gommé*. ‘Suppose we have a set-to now, instead of at our usual time.’

‘All right,’ said Yussuff; ‘but I shall play cash down, as I am going away to England to-morrow, and I take my balance with me.’

‘Very good,’ said Dunne.

They were soon at work. Dunne proposed that,

as it was to be their last day, they should play two thousand five hundred francs a game.

‘That’s rather high,’ said Yussuff; ‘however, go ahead.’ And undoing a belt, very like the one owned by Dunne, he took a £100 Bank of England note and placed it on the table.

Dunne covered it with one hundred and twenty-five Napoleons, and lost. Again and again he lost. Either he had misapprehended Yussuff’s system, or the latter had changed his play. Then again Dunne saw, as he thought, distinctly that it was only the run of the cards. The best player must win in the long-run; but would his ill luck continue? He began to grow desperate.

Fifteen games were over, of which Dunne had won three. Nine hundred pounds gone! He felt as if in a death-struggle, as if his antagonist, with knee on his chest and ten fingers gripping his throat, were slowly strangling him. Anything was justifiable in self defence. A gun, a knife—he thought of both, and of the fate of one James M. Haywood, for whose death he had been tried.

He turned a king; how it came there he could not tell. He knew how to *sauter le roi* theoretically, but not practically. He had done it for amusement as a trick, but never in a game. In Paris he had been too rich; he had now no intention of cheating, and he knew himself incapable of such a thing; but he felt certain the king had no right to be there. Could fingers act involuntarily? was it something

like kleptomania ? But Yussuff had a vole and the game, and then turned three successive kings.

Twenty-six games had been played. Of these Dunne had lost twenty-two — eighteen hundred pounds gone.

Then Dunne, with a set face, went for his belt, and took out the one hundred sovereigns in *rouleaux* of ten. These he placed on the table, against an equal sum of his own lost good money which was lying there. He lost. Yussuff then stood up, and said he must go.

Dunne begged of him to stop and play one more game for five hundred pounds. Yussuff demurred, saying that he had to call early for Mademoiselle Estelle, and dared not keep her waiting. However, at length he gave way, and sat down once more.

Dunne put a cheque for five hundred pounds on the table.

‘What time do you go to-morrow ?’ said he.

‘In the afternoon.’

‘Do you mind paper ?’

‘Of course not, *mon cher*, from you. It is only I who play cash, because I have my money about me. Besides, I can easily change this at your bank before I start to-morrow. Now for one more rally.’

Yussuff made three, Dunne scored two ; Yussuff one, Dunne two, and would have been out, but that his queen fell to a king of the same suit. Yussuff dealt again ; *and he held the king !*

‘That’s a ripping gamble !’ said Yussuff as he

jumped up. 'Now I must bolt. I shall be back on the 21st, and give you your revenge. Or run over to London, and you shall have it there; or come with me to-morrow. I'll play you all the way in the train. You collared my tactics yesterday; but there are other systems—many others;' and he disappeared, springing lightly down the stairs, three at a time.

Dunne laid his head on his hands, and for an instant his chest shook, as if he were about to sob. Then he sat up, and mechanically searched all his pockets. He had left in gold three hundred and thirty francs, and twenty-two francs in silver. This was all that remained out of six hundred thousand dollars. He had been fooled. He had been a guileless child in the hands of this scoundrel. He, the villain who had pretended to learn the game from him, who had taken his instructions, who had been advised by him as to the books to read. Could he have acquired such a mastery of the game since he came to Paris? No! Diabolically, fiendishly, he had humbugged him, Roderick V Dunne, the smartest man of them all. What was this nigger but a card-sharper? If this were Arizona, and he shot the swindler, who would think the worse of him? Would any jury of free miners convict him? No!—eternally no! He took his pistol; it was empty. He revolved the chambers, and listened to the clicks. He had no real intention of committing murder, but he felt a savage comfort in thinking of Yussuff and

hearing his revolver click; he then loaded it, and put it in his rear pocket. As he placed it there a great wave of emotion passed over him. As in a transformation scene, the Bois, the Boulevards, splendour and luxury faded away, and the great West floated before his memory. That pistol on his hip made him a man again.

With one sublime wrench he threw from him his weakness and his puling regrets. He rose up, the reckless digger once more. Where was his manhood if he allowed himself to be a coward? He once more counted out the money he had. That sum was no use to him. He went to the nearest hell and staked, and won again and again. He found himself with five thousand francs. He controlled himself by a strong effort, and turned and left the room.

As he walked along the street he was hailed by a boyish voice.

‘Holà, Monsieur Dunne,’ said a handsome boy of twenty. ‘I was about to call on you, and thank you much for the time you allowed me, and also to pay you the fifteen hundred. You remember you would not take any written promise from me. However, I sent you an I O U all the same.’

Dunne remembered having won from this youth, who came to him next morning to tell him that he could not pay at once. Now, Dunne was not at all the style of man to be sold by callow juniors who plunge, pocket winnings and compound losings. He

reckoned up this young man, however, and thought he was safe for the amount; and he was not at all sorry to get the money at this critical moment. He gave a receipt cancelling the I O U to the young man, and returned towards his rooms. As he went he thought how he had felt when he risked losing the money he had just had repaid. In those days he had three millions, as the French reckon. Then the possible chance of losing a small sum was a matter of little consequence. As he thought he ground his teeth. All weakness, all vain regrets were past. All his bitterness was concentrated in an intense blasting hate for Yussuff. Even bad as things were now, there would be a chance of something turning up were it not for that cheque given to Yussuff. He had now two hundred and sixty pounds; thirty would take him to America; he could live for a few days in Paris for a small sum. But at nine o'clock to-morrow morning that cheque would be presented, and there was nothing to meet it. This was what would ruin him. All Paris would in a few hours know of his collapse. But for this cheque all would be safe. He might tide over a few months and then the mine might be all right after all, though as he thought these words his heart became once more as weak as water. Too well he knew the ordinary signs of finality in that sort of income. Still, were it not for the cheque he might have left Paris with flying colours. Yes, and come back with drums beating—why should he not?

But that cheque would smash him. Marie would hear of it.

And how had that cheque been won? By the king held, and three times previously the king had been marked by Yussuff at critical periods. True, it was after a king had danced before Dunne's eyes in his own hand; but he had done nothing wrong—he was not reduced to that yet. The more he thought of it, the more certain he became that Yussuff was a sharper, and he swore a deep, long oath that if he ever met him where juries took gentlemanly views of shooting, he would kill Yussuff at sight, and take his trial cheerfully. Dunne had been tried before. He had shot only one man in Texas, and he had been tried for his life. The jury had decided that the corpse had always been a skunk, and, as there were no witnesses, there could be little doubt that Dunne, who was a hardworking man, must have been in the right, so they all liquored up freely and Dunne thought no more of the matter.

On reaching home he was told that a gentleman had called for him and been to his rooms, but had finally gone away. He went up and found a letter which he saw was from the financier—father of his beloved Marie. It read as follows :

‘MY DEAR MR. DUNNE,

‘It is not necessary for me to tell you that for people who follow the profession to which I devote my life it is necessary to seek constantly for

information of the most varied kind. You so thoroughly know this to be of necessity that I make no excuse for informing you that I am compelled to keep myself perfectly at home in North American finance, of which some rumours have of late been anything but pleasant. I would beg of you to call on me to-morrow about two o'clock to consult about American affairs. I need scarcely say that I do this in the interest of my dear child. She has had many offers of good *partis*, of whom I must acknowledge you have hitherto been the best. I hope the Dollbys' crash took but a small portion of your immense fortune. Until to-morrow, with profound consideration,

‘I remain, etc.,

‘ACHILLE BRITONNE.’

Two o'clock, and by two o'clock everyone would know that his cheque for a paltry five hundred pounds had been dishonoured. He would borrow. Alas! he was not sufficiently intimate with any rich man, and friends like the mousquetaires had not got the money. Besides, during this crisis no one would lend money to anyone, as nobody knew who might be ruined by the crash.

He walked up and down the room like a caged tiger. At length a ray of hope presented itself. He would own up to Yussuff that he was short of money, and ask him to delay the cheque, and if that failed, ask him to take two hundred as part payment. It was a desperate resource, but the only one possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAFÉ ROCOCO.

YUSSUFF in the meantime called for Estelle, and took her for a drive in the Champs Elysées. She was as happy as a Parisienne, and as gay as a lark. They continued their drive so long that, arriving at the Café Rococo, they found all the others assembled.

Never was there a more pleasant dinner. The mousquetaires were in splendid form. Dunne was comparatively silent, but drank profusely, so much so that all looked forward to the near approach of the moment when the wine would produce its natural effect, and he should become very amusing indeed.

‘And so, my poor Prince, you are going to that horrible London,’ said Estelle. ‘You will get catarrh, and it is so gloomy that their wine even does not sparkle. Is it as large as Paris?’

‘Much larger,’ said Aramis. ‘They have there five millions of inhabitants.’

‘Five millions of fools!’ said Estelle. ‘They live where they have no sun, no *cancan*, no ballet, no laughter, where all is sad and melancholy. Ah, my dear Prince, you will become a beef-eater, and so large, with a corset of forty inches, and your cheeks like that, and you will speak slowly and solemn as an Englishman;’ and Estelle, who was a capital

mimic, gave a very comic representation of her forecast. 'Why do you go where they have no happiness—where they have no little suppers?'

'They have much better than all that in London,' said Athos: 'they have gold, they have money in immense sums. We have rich men in France—men who make large fortunes; but they spend them. In London, in their Lombard Street, they have millions on millions—enough to buy all the ground of France over and over again. Not millions of tenpenny pieces, as they call our money, but millions of *rouleaux*, each of twenty-five francs.'

'Millions of *rouleaux*,' said Estelle. 'Ah, then I think I shall go to London. The sound of that sentence pleases me.'

'They know how to live too,' said Athos. 'We are vain of our Bois and Champs Elysées, but they are not equal to Rotten Row.'

'No,' said Dunne, 'they are not. And, proud as I am of my own country, our Fifth Avenue is not for one moment to be compared with Rotten Row. Nor is Unter-den-Linden equal to it, nor the Beach in Madras, nor the Lal Bagh, nor the Eden Gardens. There is no nation which can boast a show equal to the Ladies' Mile in the season.'

Then Estelle sang, and Athos told some racy society stories, and Porthos related some doughty doings of his ancestors, and Aramis's wit coruscated, and the corks popped, and mirthful laughter rang, and all went merry as a marriage-bell.

They had moved from the dining-room, and sat in a glazed veranda. Yussuff had told one or two weird stories of adventure. He had never spoken of his hunting experiences before, not even so much as to give the history of the larger skins in his rooms. His last tale had been of a very blood-curdling nature. When it finished a flash of silence fell on the group.

‘Athos may talk of Rotten Row,’ said Yussuff, ‘but to my mind earth contains no picture so fair as that now lying before us. Why is it that so often we enjoy the beauty of a scene only when it is past? Why should not we evanescent beings be always on the *qui vive* for a beauty which is present? Why, instead of trying for the means of happiness, should not we try for happiness itself? Look out before you. God has so made us that to look thoughtfully and with responsive appreciation on the beautiful is our bliss. Can there be a more lovely sight? Look at the Trocadéro, and the Bridge of Jena, and the Champs de Mars, and see that most graceful and most magnificent of structures, the Eiffel Tower, and that midnight sky which I have never seen surpassed. See the tracery of the tower, like finest lace, showing against the moon; see the millions of lights all round; listen to the refined hum of the Parisian world as they return from the theatres. To my mind that tower is the most graceful structure ever designed by man.’

‘You are right,’ said Dunne. ‘Beauty in architecture is derived from evidence of strength, suita-

bility, harmony, grace, and the poetry of form, and the idealization of an emotion. Grecian architecture in our latitudes is always offensive; its lines are horizontal, and meant to throw shadows from a vertical sun. Our Gothic shadow lines are vertical and meant to——'

'*Ah, bien,*' said Estelle, placing her hands on her ears. 'My dear Monsieur Dunne, charming Monsieur Dunne, how I love you when you are not too wise! But have pity on me.'

'I am glad you agree with me,' said Yussuff to Dunne, laughing at Estelle. 'But this I must say: the view from the summit is glorious beyond conception. It is to civilization what the view from Nanga Parbat is to savage nature.'

'And I have never seen it!' said Estelle. 'Oh, how superb! I have my idea; I shall go up now. After midnight no one with wit and good looks has ever made the ascent. Come, let us go. I will ascend to the summit. Porthos will carry up four bottles of champagne, one in each hand—two he has placed elsewhere. We shall mount—we shall ascend. Ah, the idea—it is original. You others, you three millions of Paris, we are *ennuyé* of your tiresome doings. It is Estelle only who can do something new. Ah, how sweet the hecatomb of envy to-morrow! At the summit I shall be Rachel; you will all kneel down. I shall kneel and stand magnificently erect, at the same moment, with a red cap and a standard, and I shall sing:

‘“ Allons ! enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de boire est arrivé ;
C'est pour nous que les boudins grillent,
C'est pour nous qu'ils sont préparés (bis).
Regardez donc, vos cuisiniers ;
Rôtir les jambons, les dindons.
Venez donc, bons citoyens !
Crinquons ! Buvons ! Chantons.
À boire, citoyens !
Vidons tous nos flacons,
Buvons, buvons, qu'un vin bien pur
Émeuve nos poumons.”

Quick !' continued she. 'A red cap and a standard, Alphonse. A *bonnet rouge*, a flag for me—for Estelle ! Run, leap, bound to the *fille de chambre* you love best ; tell her to help you.'

'I am afraid you will be disappointed to-night,' said Dunne. 'The tower is closed for repairs. Painting is to commence in a few days. Before being painted ironwork has to be scraped, and if the slightest piece of decayed rust be left underneath when the coat is put on, it leads to a rapid disintegration of the metal. This is the danger inherent in all steel structures.'

'Ah, ciel !' said Estelle, 'he has drunk too much. Whenever he is like that he always tries to teach me something, which no man in his senses would ever think of doing. But my dear Dunne, my own Roderick, you who are so wise, so noble, so much of the all-circular man, you can help me, you can make a way for me—who loves you so much. I will do anything for you, my own darling Roderick, if you

get me up this very night. To-morrow will be no good. People will have heard the talk; there will be nothing to strike, to startle, to make a story so good, so piquant that it will go all round Paris. Three times shall I drive along the Bois, so that different people may all see me. I shall be the word of the day. And it is so hard to get the eye of Paris, and Paris is so fickle! Ah, I shall die of chagrin. But you will save my life, my dear, darling Roderick.' Estelle left her chair. 'I never loved anyone before Roderick; ah, my heart will break!'

'Surely,' said Yussuff, 'there must be men on the work. I noticed a few days ago when passing that there were huts near the centre below; knock those men up. Give them a hundred francs. I never yet knew anything of this kind to prove impossible against money, tact, and determination. At all events, we can try.'

'Yes, yes,' said Estelle. 'Go, my own sweet Roderick, and proffer to these gentlemen the paper of the French Republic. Ah, you are good! You are the Bayard, the *preux chevalier*, and much more handsome than Athos.'

Dunne stood up, and mechanically put his hand in his pocket.

'By Jove, I have left my purse at home!' said he.

'Here you are,' said Yussuff, undoing his belt and producing a note. 'No, this won't do; it's English.' He thrust his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a number of notes, which he threw on the table.

Estelle reckoned them rapidly—one hundred and eighty francs.

‘Make it two hundred, Yussuff,’ said she. ‘Monsieur Dunne will make a good bargain. Trust him; he has wisdom. He will give you back the balance, or, rather, he will give it to me, and I shall keep it for you as your banker.’

Yussuff sought for and drew with some difficulty a pocket-book from a pocket which was evidently one got at with trouble. He opened this receptacle, which was one of a very unusual size; it was divided into compartments, and from one he selected a two-hundred-franc note, which he handed to Dunne.

‘Oh, but you are rich!’ said Estelle. ‘How many have you there? Let me hold it in my hands.’

She jumped playfully at the book. It fell on the marble table; there was a noise of a peculiar kind—not the jingle of gold, nor the soft thud of notes. It more resembled the sound of glass marbles.

‘I shall do as you wish, mademoiselle,’ said Dunne; ‘but I warn you that I may fail. Alphonse, bring me some brandy.’

He poured out a glass and drank it off with a gulp, and started on his mission.

‘He will be drunk,’ said Estelle.

‘Nonsense,’ said Aramis; ‘that is only to steady himself.’

At this instant the door opened, and Dunne looked in.

‘I may be some time away,’ said he. ‘The fore-

man is the man to square, and he may live elsewhere.'

'All right,' said Estelle, who was now intently engaged in doing the amiable to Yussuff, from whom she wanted the present of a certain costly bracelet which she had seen in the Boulevard des Italiens.

Now, Yussuff spent money freely; but when he wished to avoid doing a thing, he had a marvellous facility in slipping away. He appeared to love Estelle; he was kind, he had been liberal. Even now he felt the charm of her presence, but she could not pin him to this bracelet. Again and again she returned to the charge; but with the most respectful tenderness he escaped. The fact is, she was afraid she would not see him for some time, and wished for something as a memento, of a value proportionate to her regard; while he thought this ornament cost more than he cared to spend. While waiting the return of Dunne they whiled away the time with a little baccarat.

The game soon became very lively. Yussuff lost, and made frequent calls on his pocket-book. Estelle won, and became more eager and excited every moment. The time fled rapidly. Then Estelle lost a little, and her enthusiasm cooled.

'Where can Monsieur Dunne be?' said she. 'Why, how time passes! He has been two hours gone.'

At this moment Dunne entered, and said he had made it all right.

‘Bravo!’ said Estelle, jumping up. ‘Now at last I shall rival Rachel. Athos, take all this,’ cried she, pushing over a confused heap of paper and coin. ‘Give it back to me to-morrow, with interest, mind you—fifty francs interest; you bankers pay for money left on deposit—I know that. Now for my Phrygian cap, for my standard. Alphonse, we will have some Jules Meissner at the summit of the tower. *Allons!*’

She danced round the room, ran to the window to look once more at the structure, and then proceeded quickly to wrap up. Athos had carefully counted her winnings, and made a note thereof.

‘Let us not go without umbrellas,’ said Yussuff.

‘Bah! it is a night of a million,’ said Estelle.

‘Ah, mademoiselle,’ said Yussuff, ‘you have not watched the skies as I have. There is a storm in the air; and we have not played out our hands.’

Very soon afterwards they started, and before very long they were at the summit.

The view was unprecedented. But in going up they had forgotten Alphonse, who had lagged behind. Estelle was impatient at the delay.

‘Mademoiselle,’ said Porthos, ‘I make it a rule to peruse each day some of the history of my ancestors. I read this morning of le Sieur Anatole du Moulin Rouge, who in all combats, sieges, and campaigns, besides carefully overseeing the general commissariat, always had a bottle of his own. On leaving just now, I thought of my ancestor.’

‘And you brought?’ said Estelle.

‘A bottle of my own,’ said Porthos, who was half-seas over, ‘and here it is. For glass I have a silver cigarette-case.’

‘And I a pocket-pistol,’ said another.

Yussuff rapidly explained that Estelle could shoot it down his throat from on high, as we often see Hindoos of different castes assist each other. They were all ready.

Then Estelle sang her song; no parody this time. It was weird, that Marseillaise, sung over sleeping Paris—over that city which had so often quivered to its sound. A feeling of awe overcame them all as they listened on their knees. Would Paris hear it? A twelve-pounder fired where they were would scarcely be heard below. Estelle herself was impressed. She was impulsive, but she loved to believe in the depths of her own feelings. It was a scene to be ever remembered as, inspired by the concentrated essence of the feelings of that mighty city focussed on that tiny platform at an elevation of one thousand feet, she burst forth into an inspired patriotic address, in which, fired with the courage, and the greatness, and the glory of France, she exhorted them to remember always to die for the ‘Patrie.’

She swayed their feelings; at that moment her soul mastered all the other souls. There was one electrical shout, one lingering glance of love and pride over the sleeping city. They entered the lift,

which, by the slowness and gravity of its descent, seemed to feel and sympathize with the chastened sadness of their emotions. For many, many minutes they descended, lost in thought, until they reached the second platform, where they got out, as the upper lift descends only six hundred feet. Here they found Alphonse, who had arranged a number of bottles of wine in a small kiosk, which for a time had been used as a restaurant.

At this instant a superb meteor flashed across the sky. All stood delighted, and not a little startled. When they began to talk again the mover of the upper lift came to say that Alphonse had in the meantime gone down by the lower lift for the glasses, which he had forgotten and left at the bottom. Athos proposed to break up at once, but Estelle insisted on 'one more glass before we go.'

'My faith,' said she, 'it is not often I get patriotic, and solemn, and noble; but when I do, I soon afterwards become very thirsty. Holla! Alphonse, you are back. Now fill, Prince.'

'Where is the Prince?' said Aramis.

Athos strolled round to the other side of the platform.

'Where is Monsieur Dunne?' said Porthos.

'Both left above,' said Estelle. 'Ah! my oratory, behold what real eloquence can do. They are still on their knees, inspired by my words. Depart quickly, thou Charon of perpendicularity, and bring them down.'

The lift attendant re-ascended. He was a long time gone. Up the centre of the tower there is a hollow pipe. Presently a door in this opened and out came Dunne, looking ghastly pale beneath the starlight.

‘How did you get in there?’ said Athos. ‘That ladder is only for the workmen. Is Yussuff coming down this way too?’

‘Is he not here?’ said Dunne. ‘He came down with you.’

‘No,’ said they all; ‘you and he were left behind.’

‘You all got in except me,’ said Dunne. ‘There was no one else left behind.’

‘You remember that huge heap of tools, and materials, and casks above?’ said Athos. ‘He most likely got on the other side of that to see Montmartre, and did not hear us starting. Here he comes,’ as the lift slowly descended.

‘Ah,’ said the attendant as he alighted, and seeing Dunne, ‘so you came down the inner ladder; hard work, is it not?’

‘But where is the Prince?’ said Aramis. ‘Why did you not bring him down?’

‘There is no one above,’ said the attendant.

‘Then depend upon it,’ said Athos, ‘he found the door of the inner way open. He either saw Monsieur Dunne going in, or he looked in and heard him going down, and he followed. He will be here in a moment, or he may have got stuck in the

way in some manner which we cannot now account for. I will go up the staircase in the central pillar to meet him, and give him aid, if aid be necessary.'

'Pardon, monsieur,' said the attendant of the lower lift, which carries people four hundred feet from the base to the second platform, 'you do not know the difficulties you are about to undertake. It would be impossible for you to do what you wish; there are things known only to us and to the engineers. I will go up; I will rescue your friend; and there are certain points on the way from which I can telephone to you here. I know these points—you do not.'

'That is well,' said Athos. 'Listen, then. The Prince is not an engineer, and he may have got himself into an awkward predicament near the upper end of this column. In that case it would be more easy for him to go upwards than downwards to reach fresh air. I will therefore go up by the lift again to the summit, and if you have to ascend the whole way, you will find us above.'

'And I will go with you,' said Aramis.

'And I,' said Porthos.

'No,' said Athos; 'you stay here, Porthos, with Mademoiselle Estelle.'

They entered the upper lift, and quickly ascended.

At the instant they started there was a terrific explosion, as of a salvo, and a blinding flash. A ball of fire was seen dashing through the heavens with an immense velocity. It seemed to strike the

summit of the tower. Estelle shrieked. Peal after peal of thunder roared, till the structure rocked beneath the force of the sudden hurricane.

‘Do not fear,’ shouted Dunne to Estelle. ‘In the whole world there is not a place safer in a storm than that in which you now are. This whole edifice is in itself an immense lightning conductor. The tower may be struck, but the people within it are absolutely safe.’

‘Oh, dear Monsieur Dunne, explain all that to me again,’ said Estelle. ‘I love to have you teach me.’

She was very much frightened. Porthos looked at the lightning, as in scathing ribbons, hundreds of yards in length, and of blinding brightness, it darted like fiery snakes all around them. The view was sublime.

At the top the other two mousquetaires surveyed the scene. Animated by the same indefinable instinct, they looked around. The upper platform was about eight yards square. A light railing, more than breast high, ran all round. The central column came up through the middle. The wind, laden with a tropical downpour of raindrops of immense size, had a terrific force. In the middle of the platform lay a pile of articles, left by workmen employed in painting the structure. There was a huge cauldron, in which paint had been mixed; a pile of scaffold-poles, used not as ordinary scaffolding, but to make small platforms for the painters; there were masses of material, and coils of rope.

After a brief survey of these items, both the mousquetaires sat down on the lee side of the central column, trying to seek shelter from the force of the tempest. All attempts to keep dry would have been useless. They had become saturated in a few moments, and the platform was running with streams of water.

The squall ceased almost as quickly as it had commenced. It came from a storm cloud which, at that great height, would have swept over Paris if it had not been exploded by meeting the tower. The stars now shone brilliantly, and opening a door, which they had not noticed, the lower lift attendant appeared.

‘Well, messieurs, is he here?’ said the man.

‘Have you not found him?’ said they.

‘No, most certainly,’ said the lift man. ‘He is not in the column.’

Athos looked at Aramis; Aramis looked at Athos. An uncanny, creepy, cold feeling enveloped them both. Almost mechanically they both turned to the pile of materials. Then, aided by the workmen, one by one they began to remove the scaffold-poles, the kegs of paint, the coils of rope; they examined the large cauldron. What was it they sought for? Was it a corpse? Everything was turned over. Nothing was found. Then the four ceased working.

‘There may be something very serious in the air,’ said Athos. ‘On the other hand, this mystery may

be no mystery at all. Perhaps the Prince did not feel well, and went down first of all; so that we shall now find him at the bottom.'

'Impossible,' said the lift man. 'My mates are below; they would have seen him go out, and we should have known. It seems to me this will be a matter for the police. Old Father Jaquemin, our foreman, will find himself in trouble. As for me, I only do as he orders me.'

'Well,' said Aramis, 'let us do nothing in a hurry. Let us spend two minutes here, thinking. If that leads to no result, let us go down.'

Athos and Aramis pondered on the case for two minutes, and then they all entered the lift, and soon found themselves on the second platform.

Estelle and her two companions were in the restaurant. Alphonse stood outside. Athos and Aramis approached Estelle. The lift man went to speak to Alphonse.

'Where is the Prince?' said Estelle.

'He is not above,' said Athos; 'and he is not on the ladder in the central column.'

'Mon Dieu!' said Estelle, 'where can he be? You saw him last, Monsieur Dunne.'

'I?' said Dunne. 'I do not remember seeing him above at all. In fact, now I think of it, I don't think he went up to the top.'

'Why, surely,' said she, 'you remember my pouring the wine down his throat? Can he be hidden in any place? Athos, Aramis, you are

playing a joke upon us. He is in the lift at this moment. Ah, Prince,' said she, 'I have found you out !'

She bounded into the lift, but it was empty.

'Come, Aramis,' said Porthos, 'we have had quite enough fooling ; the joke is a bad one, and the night is getting bitterly cold. I am going home. Alphonse, give me a glass of wine before I go.'

But there was no Alphonse ; more than that, the lower lift had vanished, and they were left isolated, four hundred feet above the ground level.

'He is probably gone to see if the Prince has in some mysterious manner returned to the *café*,' said Porthos.

'And we are left to wait here ; the lift man will stay for his return ; I shall catch my death of cold,' said Estelle.

'There is a circular staircase outside the tower downwards from this stage. I will go down by that and send up the lift at once, mademoiselle,' said Dunne.

He walked briskly across the platform and disappeared down the spiral way. Very soon after the noise of the lift was heard. They all stood around the door as it opened, when out stepped a commissaire of police ; twelve men followed him. The friends were told they must consider themselves under arrest, as was also the upper lift attendant. Alphonse accompanied the commissaire, and talked volubly with many gesticulations. He pointed

rapidly to each, giving the name, and a short history of every one, finally exclaiming :

‘Where is Monsieur Dunne?’

‘Where is Monsieur Dunne?’ repeated the commissaire.

‘He went down there by the outside spiral staircase some time ago’

‘Aha!’ quoth the commissaire, with a world of meaning.

He had the eagle eye of a general. In a minute all his arrangements were made. Two men were sent by lift to the summit; two began the ascent through the central column; four became guards on the friends in the lower lift; four remained on the second platform.

The lift party quickly reached the ground. Almost as they stopped Dunne ended his descent of the outside spiral staircase. It is an affair of time coming down in that manner. The instant his foot touched the ground he was roughly seized by four men. He made a desperate attempt at resistance, and got his hand half into the pocket which contained his revolver. He was, however, over-mastered, and the whole party were soon at the police-office, where Alphonse made a sworn statement to the effect that at supper he had waited on the *convives*. Monsieur le Prince had frequently taken out a large pocket-book. It had fallen and given out a very peculiar sound. Subsequently, when the Prince was taking out a note, Alphonse had observed, from

an inner division of the book, the sparkle of a diamond. The prisoners were retained in custody.

Next morning, at a very early hour, the group appeared before the judge of instruction.* By this time many of their friends had been communicated with. The principal of Athos' bank arrived to answer for his assistant; a crowd of people appeared for the others; an American millionaire appeared to testify to Dunne's character, and with him came the financier, the father of the Marie whom Dunne loved. These and others constituted a crowded audience.

Preliminary evidence was taken as to the dinner at which the Prince was host. It was told how the party proposed to ascend the tower; how Dunne was sent to negotiate for permission. After he left baccarat had commenced, and continued until Dunne's return. Alphonse then proceeded to describe the Prince's repeated applications to his pocket-book, and how on one occasion he had noted the flash of a diamond.

'Did any other person in the room note that flash?' said the judge.

'Yes,' said Alphonse. 'Looking up, I met Monsieur Dunne's eye, and I felt instinctively that he had seen what I had observed.'

'Monsieur,' said Athos, 'I can throw light on that subject. Yesterday Monsieur le Prince drew from our bank the whole of his deposit. This, I have

* The *juge d'instruction* in France is the magistrate entrusted with the preliminary inquiry into a criminal charge.

reason to believe, he handed over for the purchase of jewellery of immense value from an Oriental potentate now in Paris. I expected that he would borrow money on these jewels and replace his deposit. There was not time to do this yesterday, and it occurred to me, when I saw the pocket-book bulging so much, that he had got the *parure* with him.'

'How did you obtain all this information?' said the judge.

'As to drawing out the money, that I knew of myself, as I paid it to him at my bank. As to his dealings in diamonds, I was told all about it by Monsieur D'Arblay, of the well-known firm of jewellers.'

'Was anyone else present when you received this information?'

'Yes, there were my two friends'—indicating Porthos and Aramis—'and, yes, of course, I remember there was Monsieur Dunne.'

The judge turned to Alphonse.

'At what instant,' said he, 'did you observe the flash of the diamond lying in the pocket-book?'

'When Monsieur le Prince took out a note and handed it to Monsieur Dunne to negotiate with the workmen at the tower.'

'Was that before the baccarat?'

'Before the baccarat.'

'Did the play continue long after Monsieur Dunne's return?'

‘The play ceased immediately on his return.’

‘But you have already stated that the Prince took out his pocket-book several times during the play. To go to and return from the tower would not take more than fifteen minutes. That is not time for a great many games of baccarat.’

‘Oh,’ said Estelle, ‘the time was two hours. I remember exactly. Don’t you remember my saying so?’ said she, appealing to Porthos, who confirmed her statement.

‘How is it you spent so long a time on such a short journey?’ said the judge, addressing Dunne.

‘I found the workmen would not agree to our little enterprise unless the foreman was squared. He had gone to his home when his day’s work was over, so I had to go and hunt him up. He lives in a very close neighbourhood with many small streets. There is another street of the same name as that in which he resides in a different quarter. I asked my way from a *sergent de ville*, and he directed me to the wrong one. I then lost my way, which took some time to find. That is the explanation, monsieur.’

The foreman was called and stated that his rooms were ten minutes’ walk from the tower.

‘Can you, Monsieur Dunne, produce anyone who saw you during these two hours—would you recognise the *sergent de ville*? Did you meet any of your numerous friends on their way home?’

‘No, monsieur,’ said Dunne.

The story of the ascent was then told, and the scene at the summit. Then came the fact that Dunne and Yussuff were left together.

‘That is not the case,’ said Dunne. ‘I was left alone; there was no one but myself on the third stage.’

‘But the Prince went up—the Prince did not come down; you alone were left above. It is for you to explain this mystery.’

‘Pardon me, monsieur; it is most certainly not for me to explain it. I know nothing whatever about it.’

The Judge looked at him steadily.

‘Monsieur,’ said he, ‘were there any reasons for enmity between you and the Prince? Did you love the same woman?’

‘Most certainly not,’ said Dunne. ‘I do love one woman, but the Prince, as far as I know, never saw her.’

At this moment the financier, Marie’s father, half rose, and then resumed his seat.

‘Was there any gambling between you?’

‘Yes, in a small way.’

‘Did you play frequently?’

‘Every evening for an hour.’

‘What game?’

‘*Écarté* only.’

‘What points?’

‘They varied very much: from a Napoleon a game to one hundred pounds a game.’

‘Two thousand five hundred francs!’ said the judge, in long, drawn-out accents of surprise; ‘and you call that playing in a small way? Monsieur, the statements you have just made bear an aspect of very great seriousness.’

Further witnesses were then called, and the events of the second platform were repeated in great detail. The commissaire detailed how Alphonse had come to him out of breath with running, and informed him that a murder had been committed. At this word a cold shudder seemed to pass through the assembly. He described reaching the first platform and finding all the party there save two. Before ascending, he had placed a cordon of police round the tower at thirty mètres interval, and had stationed a party at the foot of the great spiral staircase. He had himself ascended the ladder in the central column and found it empty. He had reached the summit and found no one there.

The four police who captured Dunne were then called. They described his resistance as terrific. They spoke of his frantic efforts to reach his hip-pocket, and stated that he was a man of prodigious strength and the fiercest courage, so much so that for even four men to subdue him was an act of heroism. He had fought with all the energy and desperation of despair.

‘Why,’ said Dunne, ‘in the dark I thought I was attacked by robbers. I fought for my life.’

A low hum went through the audience.

‘You will explain that in another place,’ said the judge.

Those who attended to vouch for the prisoners were now examined and very rapidly disposed of, until it came to the turn of the American who came to speak for Dunne. When he was called on, the financier, the father of Marie, stood up and asked to be allowed to lay before the court information which he believed would be regarded as of importance in connection with Monsieur Dunne. The judge in a courteous manner invited him to proceed.

‘I wish to inform justice,’ said the financier, ‘that Monsieur Dunne was one of those who suffered seriously by the recent collapse in South American securities. He had also invested largely in land in Chicago, which has now gone down in value.’

‘How much did he lose?’

‘In South American securities about one million francs.’

An ominous silence fell on the court. The American millionaire was then called on. He stated that he knew Roderick V Dunne to be an honourable and straightforward man, and a wealthy man, who could afford to lose a few millions of francs and be none the worse for it. The judge listened to him attentively, and then proceeded to give his decision.

He said that Mademoiselle Estelle and the three mousquetaires might at once leave the court. There was nothing whatever about them in the slightest degree suspicious. For Monsieur Dunne the case

was different. It was not for him at present to make any remarks, further than to state that he considered that Monsieur Dunne should have an opportunity of conducting his defence in another place. The American millionaire offered bail to any amount, but it was refused.

The friends got into separate vehicles, and quickly made for their respective homes. Athos proceeded to take that morning tub now so usual among the French, changed his clothes, and then proceeded to look for breakfast. An indefinable tendency directed his steps towards the Boulevard St. Michel. As he proceeded, a nervous feeling came over him, such as makes a man move in his sleep when gazed at fixedly. He stopped before a window where many handsome neckties were on view, and rapidly took in all the space behind him reflected by three different mirrors, impressing upon his mind the features of every face he saw. He walked on two hundred paces, and repeated the manœuvre before a window devoted to waistcoats. There was one face which he had noticed in the previous panorama. He turned rapidly, and went straight up to a shabby-genteel man, who was walking very slowly towards him, lost in contemplation.

‘Monsieur,’ said Athos, raising his hat with the utmost politeness to the spy, ‘I have not the honour of knowing your name; but I perceive that you desire to see a good deal of me. I can assure you that the wish is thoroughly reciprocated. If you

will do me the honour, I know a café, Le Bon Roi Dagobert, close by, in which we can breakfast in a most comfortable manner. Do not hesitate, monsieur. By the faith of a gentleman, you shall have a pleasant time—by my word of honour, yes.'

'Monsieur,' said the shabby-genteel one, 'you are, I perceive, a man of high breeding, and of cultivated intellect. I accept with pleasure.'

They were soon seated before a capital breakfast, when there entered Aramis.

'Ah, Athos!' said he, 'how fortunate! Allow me to introduce my dear friend Monsieur—ahem, ahem—Monsieur Tartarin de Tarascon'; and a roley-poley, shabby-genteel gentleman bowed with his hand on his heart. 'Holà, Porthos, just in time to join us, with your friend, Monsieur——'

'Monsieur—Monsieur Poquelin,' said Porthos. 'But what a magnificent carriage and pair to stop outside Le Bon Roi Dagobert! Mercy on us!'

Estelle dashed into the room, accompanied by a keen-faced, weasel-eyed little man.

'Save, save me, my friends!' she cried. 'Close the door—aha, barricade the portcullis! I am Joan of Arc; I am the maid of Saragossa. I am also hungry—here, Porthos, your strength—Aramis, tell Porthos what to do. *Patron! patron!*' she cried to the landlord, 'keep out the rabble! I am pursued.'

The landlord was a good deal put out; but he knew the friends well, and he submitted for the moment to have his doors locked.

‘Ah, heavens!’ cried Estelle; ‘but I die of hunger. Let me introduce my very dear friend Monsieur—Monsieur—oh!—Monsieur Mouchard. He is of the police, but so genteel. Ah, my friends, I have the military gift. I have the genius of tactics. In the war of *revanche* I will be general. I will order my troops by telegraph, with a long wire, and I shall make my combinations. Who lives will see. Behold, I was surrounded, encompassed by reporters—in battalions, in phalanxes, in legions. But I know my strategy. I fly, full of courage—you know our back way into La Petite Rue D’Arouet?—Monsieur Mouchard aided me, and in a moment procured a magnificent turn-out—here I am. *Allons, mangeons, buvons!*’

Then a confused and distant noise was heard. It might have been an earthquake, or a revolution.

‘It is the pursuit!’ cried Estelle.

They ran to the windows.

‘Great Scott!’ said Athos, who spoke English;

“A hundred *voitures* cleft the throng,
Clattered a hundred steeds along.”

The boulevard was crowded with vehicles, each one carrying a reporter. An emissary of the *Birmingham Referee* spied Estelle, and shouted, ‘Yoicks, tallyho!’ But the vixen had gone to earth.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Mouchard was writing like one possessed. A lanky man, with a chin-tuft, appeared at the window, and saw Mouchard. Ten

minutes afterwards a huge pocket-flask, suspended by copper wire, dangled in the empty fire-grate. Mouchard ran and crammed into it a report, written in cabalistic characters. The flask was jerked up the chimney, and the party went on with their breakfast.

Mouchard must have been a man possessed of rare gifts of fascination, for, notwithstanding their very short acquaintance, Estelle evidently possessed for him a great deal of esteem. They soon quite forgot the tumult outside, and talked of the mystery of the previous night. Mouchard sat beside Porthos, and ordered a bottle of champagne. Porthos found his new friend a very good fellow, and told him all his own history and a little of that of some of his ancestors. Skilfully guided by Mouchard, he told all about Estelle, and Athos, and Aramis, and the Prince. Mouchard wrote it all down in a book in mystical letters. His fingers seemed to fly. He heard everyone and listened to four different conversations at once. He said to Porthos:

‘I note your words, monsieur, for the chief of the police, knowing that every sentence and every fact will be of benefit to you. The history of your ancestors will be enshrined in the archives of justice; and in future years your descendants will read with pride what a part you, their honoured forefather, took in the history of the end of this century.’

Estelle, having finished breakfast, now put on her most thoughtful air.

‘My friends,’ said she, ‘I escaped from these reporters. Is it because I dislike publicity? Certainly not; I love it. But I did not want to be torn to pieces for nothing. Now their appetites are sharpened; now you will see that I am a diplomatist—a lady statesman. My friends, we people whose names ring through the civilized world are constantly being interviewed. Very well, I am famous; I must undergo the common lot, but in a way of my own, mark you. Why should we great people be interviewed for nothing? *Patron*, we shall now admit the reporters. But ten francs for admission. Have I not reason? Here, Porthos, take that beam which so opportunely lies in yonder corner. Cleave to the chin the first man who tries to shove his way in. Bring me paper, pens, ink, and blotting-paper.’

She rapidly tore a lot of paper into squares, and wrote on each :

Ten Francs.

ADMIT ONE.

ESTELLE.

These were passed out and paid for. No one was admitted until twenty had been sold. Then Aramis took up the work of writing the tickets, and the reporters were rapidly admitted. The first one in was a lanky man with a goatee, who took some papers from Mouchard and left the house. Porthos placed a chair on a table, and Estelle, seated thereon, told

a lengthened story, quickly taken down by a hundred pencils.

After fifteen minutes they dispersed like a cluster of sparrows who hear a shot. A number rushed to the office of an Atlantic cable; but the wire was occupied by the lanky man, who was cabling to the *New York Tabard*. Monsieur Mouchard was the reporter of that famous journal. He had attained an early interview by pretending to be a police spy, and the lanky man, while waiting for fresh copy, telegraphed nursery rhymes, so as to hold the cable. A description of the barouche and pair of steppers placed at Estelle's disposal by the *New York Tabard* had already been printed in the Knickerbocker city.

The versions of the affair appearing in Cyprus, Moscow, Valladolid, Brighton, and Kensington, all differed in details, but Estelle's name was in each, and jealousy was most generally believed to be the cause of the murder.

Estelle drove in the Bois in the *Tabard's* carriage, and even she was satisfied with the sensation created. Six thousand cards were left for her; she was the rage of the moment, and her salary was raised for a week. Notoriety does not last long in Paris. After that she began to lament Yussuff.

Mrs. Tacker, in Clapham, read of the event at breakfast. She swooned, and remained in a state of insensibility, so as to almost cause despair of her resuscitation. She afterwards went to Brighton,

gradually recovered, and before long was her own bright, fascinating self again.

Dunne was kept in durance, but treated with great consideration. The whole resources of the police were directed to the elucidation of the mystery, but no further clue was found. The case was put into the hands of a detective who, although a young man, had already become famous. He propounded many theories, but none of them would hold water. To direct suspicion to Dunne was easy enough; but where was the body? All who have had anything to do with the history of assassinations know that the terrible difficulty which confronts the murderer after the commission of his crime is how to dispose of the remains.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUDGE OF INSTRUCTION.

A WEEK afterwards Dunne was again brought before the court. As the judge looked at the prisoner, he could not hide from himself the fact that the accused presented a good mien. His manner showed no trepidation, and yet was quite free from bravado, and was tinged with just that amount of anxiety which would only be suitable to anyone, even the most innocent, on finding himself in the dock, under an accusation so serious as that of murder. He was asked the usual formal questions as to his name, age,

and nationality. It then appeared that, like many naturalized Americans, he had been born in England.

Two weary days were spent in interrogations on minutiae which had nothing to do with the case. He was examined very closely as to his gambling with the Prince, and nothing but an excellent memory saved him from being driven into mistakes and contradictions. He gave a long list of winnings and losses at different dates. These were taken down verbatim by the clerk, and then the bank-books were produced, which showed all cheques passing between him and the Prince. These agreed pretty well with his statements. The judge then paused for a few minutes. He looked round to see if all were ready to witness a crushing blow.

‘Prisoner,’ said he, ‘you played until you were a ruined gambler, and, driven to desperation, you murdered your friend for the money in his purse and the jewels in his pocket-book.’

‘If I did so,’ said Dunne, ‘where is the money in his purse, and where are the jewels in his pocket-book? The moon was at the full. Did I throw them to the ground below, to lie there until I should return and fetch them? You surely do not think me such a fool as to commit a crime for the sake of robbery and then decline to take the spoil? Monsieur, this is not the wisdom of justice.’

‘You were penniless; and a man ruined is desperate.’

‘Penniless! Had I not six thousand five hundred francs in my possession? which you will restore to me, monsieur, to-day, or perhaps to-morrow, when you set me free.’

‘If you had six thousand five hundred francs on you, why did you accept two hundred francs from the Prince to bribe the workmen?’

‘*Parbleu!* it was his feast, not mine. To ascend the tower was the phantasy of Mademoiselle Estelle, who was his guest, not mine. I am not stingy with my money, but I am not a Don Quixote. Would any Frenchman in my position have presumed to pay for an idea originating in this way with another?’

‘Nevertheless, you decoyed the Prince to his death by a plan paid for by his own money.’

‘Pardon, monsieur,’ said Dunne. ‘You insult a man who is debarred from reply.’

He spoke so fearlessly that the audience began to think that his case was not so bad. On his entrance they had regarded him with horror, but the exquisite nicety of the *raie*, the division in the middle of his hair, had been the cause of the commencement of a reaction in his favour, and the feeling of the audience in France often influences justice.

‘You saw the flash of the diamonds as he handed you the note.’

‘I did not,’ said Dunne, ‘I heard what the waiter swore, and it was untrue. At the time the note was handed to me the pocket-book was open but a very little way. No diamond flashed. If such a thing

happened, it must have occurred afterwards, during the play, when the pocket-book was frequently applied to, and its packing disturbed.'

'Ah! so you know all about its packing. This is almost a confession—you have convicted yourself.'

'Not at all, monsieur. The merest common-sense tells us that diamonds are packed before being placed in any temporary receptacle.'

'How do you account for your two hours' absence?'

'That I explained before: I mistook another street for the one I sought for, and afterwards lost my way.'

'It is false; you went to find your accomplices and arrange your hideous plan. If you were alone your crime would have been impossible, but with accomplices in these days of the wonders of science anything may be done.'

Dunne made no reply.

The judge then proceeded to make the most minute inquiries as to the ascent, and the interval until the time when the others went down in the lift.

'And you remained behind with your victim. Explain how it was you did not go down with the others.'

'My boot-lace had become undone,' said Dunne; 'I walked to the railing surrounding the platform in order to place my foot on a bar to fasten the lace. When I turned they were gone,'

A movement of disapprobation went through the court.

‘Laces!’ said the judge; ‘all the world wears buttons now.’

Dunne in reply showed his laced boot.

‘And then you shot your friend with your barbarous revolver. Explain how you disposed of the body.’

‘If I shot him a barrel would have been discharged. Such was not the case when I was arrested.’

‘But you might have cleaned out the chamber and loaded again.’

‘If I had done that, my pocket-handkerchief would have been soiled. You know such was not the case. You may ask why I carried a revolver. It is an old habit contracted in the Bowery, and continued for years. There are very few Americans who do not carry one.’

‘Now explain if you can how it is that you came down by the inner ladder in the central column, known only to the employés. How could you, a mere member of the outside public, even know of the existence of such an exit? Your knowledge of the secret staircase proves clearly that the whole was a deliberate, deeply laid, diabolical plan. This was no mere unforeseen series of circumstances. You knew that Mademoiselle Estelle had never been up the tower; you knew she was going to dine opposite; you knew that a pretty woman is liable to sudden

freaks. It was easy to suggest the ascent in such a manner that she would insist upon it. You thought you worked in secret, but justice tears aside the veil and throws a lurid light over all.'

'In the first place, monsieur, I am by no means a member of the outside public. I am an engineer, and when the Eiffel Tower was being constructed, I examined most carefully the drawings and descriptions of it in the professional periodicals. I was greatly taken with the idea. I regarded the tower as marking the commencement of a new era, and I considered that for beauty, magnificence, and boldness of idea, it was a structure of which even the greatest of nations might be proud. I knew the tower intimately from drawings. I could sketch the smallest details, and I could even calculate the strains on the bars.'

The court then closed for the day, Dunne having evidently improved his position in the eyes of the audience.

Next morning the examination was resumed.

'You say that you have known all about the tower,' said the judge, 'and that you can sketch details and calculate the pressure. Prove your boast.'

'Why, certainly,' said Dunne.

Provided with paper and pencils, he set to work on a small table placed in the dock. The judge left the court, and many of the spectators went outside. After an hour's work, Dunne signified that he had done all that was necessary to support his state-

ments. The judge then looked gravely at the prisoner and said :

‘Once more, do you persist in saying these sketches are correct ?’

‘Yes,’ said Dunne.

The judge rang a bell.

‘Good-morning, monsieur,’ said he to a gentleman who entered from the rear. ‘Be good enough to glance over these plans, and see if they seem to you to have been produced by a skilled engineer who has carefully studied your wonderful structure.’

The gentleman referred to, a former assistant of Monsieur Eiffel, spent some time examining the drawings, and then said :

‘These diagrams are undoubtedly the work of a skilled engineer. They are wonderfully correct as mere sketches. In fact, there is only one mistake. This,’ said he, taking up a sheet of paper, ‘shows the arches as originally designed. This is how they were shown in the original drawings, as published in the professional periodicals. A change, however, was made in the work as afterwards executed.’

‘Yes, monsieur,’ said Dunne. ‘When I found myself accidentally left alone at the summit of the tower, I was like a farmer in his own paddock. I knew my way about perfectly. I knew all about the internal ladder, and I went down it as if I had done the same thing a hundred times.’

‘Still,’ said the judge, ‘what happened to the Prince? It is for you to explain.’

‘Pardon, monsieur; it is not my *métier* to elucidate a miracle. That there is a mystery, I see; but to find it out is your business, not mine. Where is the Prince? I could not have swallowed him. There is no other way in which I could have disposed of him. I was seen going up; I was seen coming down. I went up empty-handed; I came down in the same way. I maintain that there is not one scintilla of evidence to criminate me.’

The court adjourned. That evening a consultation was held between the judge and the chief of the secret police. Long and anxiously they discussed each point.

‘Monsieur le Juge,’ said the chief, ‘this is some new *diablerie* of modern philosophy. Why, look at what science has done in the last few years! Fifty years ago, if a man twenty miles away had caused an explosion by electricity, it would have been a mystery; yet how simple it is! The accused must have accomplices. Of that I am certain, and they must be found. Most likely our mystery will turn out to be something very simple indeed; but as it is, you cannot try him for murder. He is an able man and a complete actor. He assumes the most perfect air of innocence. Where is the dead body?—that is our hitch. We had better resort to the old, old plan, so often tried but so often successful. Release him. Let him take rooms or go to his old ones; then take him up again for two days. I shall during that time fill his chambers with a number of scientific instru-

ments of detection, and all the science will not be on the side of the criminals, I assure you. When he returns his every movement will be known to me. It is our best plan.'

This course was followed, but the result was a new surprise. Two days afterwards the press of Paris was again convulsed by a sequel to the Eiffel mystery, consisting in the magical disappearance of Monsieur Roderick V. Dunne, who had been watched by a dozen of the most skilful detectives, and vanished from the midst of them.

Prince Yussuff's great friend, Monsieur Gunnis Sing, when about to start for Paris, had been laid up by a sudden and very severe attack of illness, which postponed his departure from the Eiffelberg. He arrived in Paris in a state of the greatest grief at the loss of the companion of his schooldays. He visited the police, and was by them taken to interview Monsieur Dunne, when they found that the American had vanished. Long and searching was the investigation.

The spies who had been told off to watch gave minute details of everything Dunne had done, day by day, hour by hour, and almost minute by minute, until the period of four hours before Gunnis Sing called. Of these four hours nothing was known, and all the efforts of the police of Paris were unable to find the smallest clue to Dunne's whereabouts. Gunnis Sing then proceeded, in company with the commissaire, to the Café Rococo, to interview

Alphonse the waiter. He also had vanished. He was traced to Perpignan, and from thence it was believed that he had gone to Algiers; but no further information could be procured as to his proceedings.

CHAPTER X.

THE INHERITANCE.

SOME time after the events related in the previous portion of this story, a well-dressed man with a black beard might have been seen walking down Piccadilly, about half-past seven o'clock in the evening. He turned up Old Bond Street, where ladies linger to look at the finest display of shop-fronts in the world. He soon found himself in historical Hanover Square, and on the steps of the Ibis Club. Here he inquired if Lord Oudenard was on the premises, and finding that he was, he sent in his card, which bore the name of Sir Louis Ventnor, Bart. He was very soon requested to ascend, and half-way up the stairs was met by his lordship, who shook him warmly by the hand, and took him into the strangers' room.

'I am delighted to see you, Loo,' said Lord Oudenard. 'It quite makes me feel a boy again. By Jove! how many years is it since you and I tramped up Julian Hill?'

'More than I like to remember,' said Sir Louis;

‘and I’ve been through a queer lot of adventures since then.’

‘Yes, by Jove ; what a curious world it is ! To think of your three cousins all popping off in six weeks ! Have you taken possession yet ? I have not heard of your arrival, and I fancy the fashionable intelligence brutes would be after you.’

‘Only just arrived,’ said Sir Louis. ‘I got in by a Donald Currie boat this morning. I’d been trying my luck at the diamonds.’

‘You won’t want any diamonds now, or any luck either,’ said Oudenard. ‘Poor Vivian left the place in excellent order. He was a regular type of a squire, and hardly ever came to town. He must have laid by a goodish lot of the ready, and that coal he struck brought in a lot of money. You will dine with me, of course ? Wash your hands ? Sherry and bitters ?’

Their dinner was a very pleasant one. They had been great friends at school, and they had not met or heard anything of each other since. An acquaintance of this kind begins at the exact place where it broke off. Each sees in the other, not the middle-aged person of the present, but the joyous chum of the long past. Each for the moment feels himself young again, and therein lies the charm.

Again they were Jack and Loo as of old. Both had been in the eleven of the old school. Then they talked of London ; and Oudenard, who was in the inner swim, and knew the ropes, gave Sir Louis

a good deal of information unknown to the outside public. Ventnor had been in the States, and had not been very far from where Oudenard had camped when shooting in the Rockies; that is to say, only about six hundred miles away—not far for America.

Lord Oudenard had been in the Rattlesnake Mountains near the Yellow Stone, when Ventnor was at the Marble Canyon, in Colorado. Before they separated it was settled that they should lunch together next day at the Helix, a club for which Ventnor had had his name put up on the first anniversary of his birth, and to which, in good times or bad times, he had kept up his subscription continuously. First, however, Oudenard was to breakfast with Ventnor next morning at the Métropole, and then they were to go together and look at some horses.

Having done so, they were returning towards the Métropole, when Ventnor said :

‘Do you mind my going in here to look at a directory? I want to find the address of certain lawyers named Spangam and Spink.’

‘I can tell you that without any directory,’ said Oudenard; ‘they happen to be my own men. Live up Chancery Lane—I forget the number, but I know the place well. Want to see them?’

‘Yes,’ said Ventnor; ‘I have an appointment with them to-day either for twelve o’clock or three o’clock, as may suit.’

‘Just going twelve now,’ said Oudenard. ‘Come along, I’ll show you the way.’

About this time Mr. Spangam was sitting in his private office, and Mr. Spink, the junior partner, was also in the room warming his back at the fire. As befitted a firm of such standing, Mr. Spangam was sixty, clean shaven but for gray mutton-chop whiskers; his shirt-front, watch charms, and broad-cloth were elderly respectability personified. Spink more resembled a festive young stockbroker. A note from Sir Louis Ventnor lay on the table before them.

‘Lucky chap, this claimant,’ said Spink. ‘Three lives dropped in two months.’

‘That word claimant is an unpleasant one,’ said Spangam. ‘I hope we shall have no Arthur Orton on our hands. We shall have to be very careful. These papers are very clear, I don’t deny; but one cannot be too particular.’

‘Wasn’t there something shady about this young man in days of long ago?’ said Spink.

‘There was,’ said Spangam, ‘and a bad business too—quite enough to damn a penniless Mr. Ventnor; in fact, there was talk of his being expelled from the Helix, but he left England and vanished, so no action was taken. However, that was many years ago, and there is a statute of limitation for nearly all things; besides, Sir Louis Ventnor, with thirty thousand a year, can afford to forget his chrysalis stage. By the way, someone told me that he was seen in London some time ago.’

Here a clerk brought in the cards of Lord Oudenard and Sir Louis Ventnor. They were

quickly admitted, when Oudenard introduced his old schoolfellow, and, after ten minutes' general conversation, said :

' Now, Ventnor, I'll leave you for a business talk with these two lights of the law, and I'll go and look in at the Rag.'

' All right, Jack,' said Ventnor ; ' I will follow you in ten minutes, and then drive you on to the Helix for lunch.'

The ten minutes only reached to six. Ventnor followed Lord Oudenard, leaving the partners without the slightest doubt of the legitimacy of Sir Louis' claim, but surprised at his American accent.

After lunch they spent some more hours talking of old times, and then Lord Oudenard took Sir Louis to an ' At Home ' at Lady Mallanby's. They were late ; the crowd had left, and only those remained who had been asked to stay as intimates. One of these was Miss Kitty Browne, to whom Sir Louis was introduced.

Among the favoured few was a most striking-looking young man who was addressed as Mr. Caldwyn. He was six feet two in height, and looked like an etherealized Viking. His hair was a mass of golden curls, such as we see among the men of Kent, and his shoulders were of immense breadth, and he had once been champion of the heavy weights. He was a strikingly handsome man, with a mouth and chin which denoted intense firmness ; yet on his face was a look of habitual melancholy which some-

times seemed foreign to his natural character. He advanced to Miss Browne as if he had a tremendous lot to talk about, but only said something about the weather. She did not help him out in any way, so the *tête-à-tête* flagged, and rather suddenly he made his adieux and departed.

‘I can’t make out what’s come to Mr. Caldwyn,’ said Lady Mallanby; ‘he used to be so gay, and now for a year or two he has been such a changed man. All his friends tell me the same thing. You know the way these hateful men spend their time playing billiards and drinking whiskies-and-sodas until three in the morning. He used to be a great person for all that sort of thing; but I’m told they don’t see him at his clubs now once in three months. And he used to be such a flirt—a desperate flirt! He has stopped all that, too. Mr. Simkin tells me he fully expects that Mr. Caldwyn will join the Salvation Army some day or other.’

‘Quite true,’ said Mr. Simkin, a small man with a large eyeglass. ‘Something’s come over Caldwyn; he’s like one of those chaps in the olden time, you know—been gay cavalier and all that sort of thing, and then go on like Saint What’s-his-name—the saint that had a mother, you know. He doesn’t smoke, or drink, or play, and he never gets tight, and he never backs a cert. Some say he’s going in for perpetual training to have another try for the heavies; but that would only make a man get stale. Fact is, he’s gone dotty; that’s my verdict,’ said the sage of the Albany, with an air of intense seriousness.

‘When did this transformation scene occur?’ said Miss Browne.

‘Well, really,’ said Simkin, ‘I don’t—ah, yes—I remember. We had a glorious spree at the Mumbles, and we all rollicked about, and someone went through a glass door, and we all sang “’Twas all for the love of Jemima;” and that’s the last jolly evening poor Caldwyn has had. Lemme see, just two years ago, as it might be to a day. How do, Mrs. Tacker?’

‘So glad I caught you in, Emma,’ said Mrs. Tacker. ‘I’m worked off my feet. Six different “At Homes” have I been at, and oh, the heat, and the crush, and the fatigue! For the sake of the *bon Dieu*, give me a cup of coffee and a gloria! Well, yes, this once—I am so worn out.’

And then the latest stories were told, and a cosy, pleasant quarter of an hour spent in abusing their friends. Gradually conversation became more individualized. Mrs. Tacker was very attentive to Lord Oudenard, who devoted himself to Miss Browne. She talked mostly to Mr. Simkin. Lady Mallanby made love to Sir Louis, or pretended to, and said she began to think of dying her handsome gray hair. After a very short period of rest, however, they had to separate abruptly to renew that ceaseless grind which constitutes a life of pleasure. Miss Browne remembered that it was exactly two years since she first saw Mr. Caldwyn.

As they were leaving, Mrs. Tacker dropped her

parasol. Sir Louis sprang forward, picked it up, and gave it to her. This episode caused a slight delay, which left them a little behind the others.

‘Am I to know you, or not?’ said she.

‘We’ve been introduced,’ said Sir Louis.

‘Come with me some day this week to Purfleet, and talk about old times. I shall go straight home, and I shall expect you in half an hour.’

Sir Louis assisted her into her carriage, and taking the card which she handed to him, placed it in his waistcoat pocket.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DETECTIVE.

AT No. 54, Percy Street, Pimlico, lived Mr. James Stemming, private detective. He occupied the first floor, and two rooms on the second story. Mr. Stemming was a very little man, but well-built and active as a cat. His square jaw showed great firmness, and his eyes were bright, piercing, and very rapid in their movement, for Mr. James Stemming, now seated at the table, was as keen as they make them.

The hall-door bell rang, and a lady was announced. The visitor had at one time been very good-looking, and still was a remarkably handsome woman, though her weight had increased from eight stone to thirteen, and her face had that high-toned colour

which tells of systematic good living. She remained with Mr. Stemming for half an hour, and scarcely had she left when a new client arrived. This was a gentleman aged about forty-six. His features were very handsome, or, rather, he had been very good-looking some time or other. His nose was a delicate aquiline; his cheeks were hollow and finely seamed; his voice was refined; he was exquisitely neat. He looked what he was: a man with no vices. He had no desire to do wrong of any kind, and, in fact, he had no desire to do anything of any nature whatever. Give him his cigarette and a novel, and he was happy; and yet he could not get on with his wife—hence his visit. He stayed half an hour and had a very earnest conference with Mr. Stemming.

On his departure, Stemming stretched himself, yawned, and walked into the back parlour. He threw himself into an arm-chair and lit a cigar of rare flavour, while his good little wife brought him his cup of fragrant coffee—nothing stronger—for his day's work was not done. His wife questioned him as to his visitors.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘my first client had a long story to tell. When she was a sweet little girl in Carlyon—and a devilish pretty one she must have been—a gay young fisherman passed that way and stole her heart, and then went off to return no more.

“The lassie lost her silken snood,
Which garred her greet till she was weary.”

Since then she married a rich old bloke who left her all his money; and now she wants me to get two men who will mutilate the young fisherman who left her—two men who will cut off his nose. Fifty pounds a piece to each of the men, and fifty to me with ten pounds down; and it all happened twenty-two years ago. What did I do? Well, Jennie, my dearie, the law is the law, and in any further dealings with it I intend to be on the right side of the dock, which is the outside. There's the ten-pound note, and she is good for many more tenners, but she won't get her executioners from me. You just see me play this fish—it will be a caution.'

'My second client?—Ah, that was a horse of another colour. When he was thirty he married a lady of forty-six; he had nothing and she had, and has, fifteen thousand a year. He couldn't get on with her; I fancy he is one of those womanly men with a vile, nagging, female temper, so she chucked him, and won't give him any money. He offered me five pounds to watch her, and, indeed, to find out where she is, as he wants to enforce some legal case against her. Now, five pounds is not business, and how do you think he had the cheek to offer it? Three sovereigns in hand, one in a week's time, and one when his wife's address is found. I call it impudence for him to come and proffer an honorarium of this amount to a gentleman of my standing in the profession. Now, Jennie, you know my motto: "Honesty is the best policy." Nothing

pays so well as a reputation for fair dealing. There is no honester man in England than Jim Stemming. You know, lass, I sometimes lose money through my honourableness ; but if a man wants honesty he must pay for it. Pay me well, and I'll be true. Trust me, my dear, for seeing to a neat bit of business. Fifteen thousand a year ought to pay better than a dirty five pounds in three instalments. Fetch me in the stationery : I won't move myself while I have on my considering cap.'

Jim locked his hands behind his head, leaned back in his chair, shut his eyes, crossed his left knee over his right, and slowly waved his left foot up and down. After a few minutes of deep thought he took the pen brought to him by his docile helpmate, and proceeded to write as follows :

'MADAM,

'Honesty is the best policy, and I will start by letting you know that I am Mr. James Stemming, commonly known as "Wily Jim," a detective of some note and standing in the profession. I have had to-day a visit from your husband, a man to whom I at once took a great dislike. He seems to me a person of small business capabilities. He is determined to give you a great deal of trouble, and is in as nasty a state of mind as any man can be. I almost refused to have any dealings with him, but I thought I might do better for you by keeping him in hand. I would be glad to see you here, or any place you

would appoint; or I would be happy to meet any trusted emissary from you, but it will be no use sending a messenger unless he brings five pounds as a sign or token that he really comes from you and has your confidence. In my profession we have to be cautious.

‘P.S.—I have arranged to meet your husband again on Thursday, and I can give you the office of all he is going to do. If you come to my terms you will be on the inside track, for I shall know all his plans. It is better for me to keep him on the job, as, if not, he may go to another detective, who might not act as honestly as I do in letting you know how the cat jumps.

‘I remain,

‘Yours etc.,

‘JAMES STEMMING.

‘P.S.—He can’t afford to pay much.’

‘I think that will fetch her,’ said Jim, laying down his pen, and reading over the letter with much self-applause at his own cunning. ‘She is a woman of the world. No use in trying to humbug her. She can pay and he cannot. By gum! Jennifer, it will be well worth her while to give me a hundred a year to keep on the husband’s business and get all the information. Honesty is the best policy, Jennie, my sweet, and I am going to deal fairly with this lady.’

A ring was heard at the door, and the servant

came to say that a gentleman had called to see Mr. Stemming. Jim glanced at the clock. His advertised hours were ten to four; however, he was in his office when a foreign-looking man entered. Their consultation lasted about a quarter of an hour. Jim came out looking very serious, and sitting down, proceeded to don his considering cap. Jennie remained quiet so as to allow the great mind to work.

Jim thought his problem out as far as he could go, and then said :

‘Jennie, this is a deep thing. This is a job which will last, and has a great deal more in it than I see at present. This ’ere gent is a foreigner—a Frenchie, I take him to be. He is a deep one. I can tell you what: he is nearly as smart as I am myself. Blowed if I didn’t think for a while that he was a ’tec himself; though, if he were, why should he come to me? What did he tell me? Nawthing. What clue did he give? Nary. Only one word: I’m to watch a swell;’ and Jim threw on the table a slip of paper containing a name and address. ‘Any information will be paid for. No hint as to what kind of information is wanted. He tabled a five-pound note. That’s business. Tell you what, Jennie, I’m on this affair. Wily Jim is on this trail. There’s money in it, sure as eggs is eggs. You know French, dearie. Do you remember trying to teach me one day when we were spooning in Sittingbourne? You must teach me now. None of your

dashed grammar, but just the ordinary jaw. I'll get a book.'

And with the wonderful quickness which marked all his movements, Jim got his hat, skipped downstairs, and soon returned with a French phrase-book. He sat down and took a half-hour's lesson. Jim was a remarkably smart man, and at the end of that half-hour he knew as much of the language as many would have learned in a week.

'Now, Jennie,' said he, 'is this the real Simon Pure? You must get a month's French lessons from a genuine native, and then we will talk nothing else. It will double the business. Trust my brain—trust Wily Jim. When a man gets an opening let him push in. This is my first chance of a French job, and see if I don't make a big thing out of French business.'

Jim then proceeded to attire himself *en grande tenue*. His really well-shaped person was soon arrayed in remarkably well-built clothes. His hat was brushed to perfection by his wife, and he snipped a flower from the window and placed it in his button-hole. A pair of new kid gloves were, after much manipulation and a free use of French chalk, fitted to his stumpy fingers, and with a masher crooked stick, Jim contemplated his reflection with great self-content.

'Dooood good-looking chap,' said he, bestowing a kiss on Jennie and pirouetting on his heel. 'I'll be back about eleven. Good-bye.'

‘I’ve got no money, Jim,’ said she.

‘What do you want of money?’ said Jim. ‘Mrs. Denby, the landlady, will get you anything you want. Ta-ta.’

Jennie listened to his step going down the stairs, and watched him up a street facing the window. She then turned round and strode up and down the room like a caged tigress. She stamped, she swore, she foamed at the mouth, then fell on the sofa in a fit of hysterics, which culminated in a storm of tears, in the midst of which she suddenly ceased, rushed to the looking-glass, and examined her features. She then poured into a basin some hot water, and bathed her eyes with rose-water. Half an hour was spent in removing all trace of her agony. She dared not have her cry out for fear it would spoil her beauty. Then she spent fifteen minutes in contemplation of her own good looks.

Jennie was very vain, as every handsome woman ought to be. And, in truth, her face could hardly have been prettier. Her broad low brow was smooth and white as alabaster, and her hair was a mass of floss silk, dark as the raven’s wing. Her eyebrows appeared to be naturally pencilled; her eyes were the deepest velvety brown, and her shoulders were curves of beauty, while arms, hands, feet, were all models for a sculptor. Yes, she could not deny the fact that she had never seen a woman so handsome as herself. She had seen girls with

hair as lovely or eyes as beautiful, but never anyone so perfect in every detail.

She went to a big chest of drawers, took out a dress and spread it on the bed, and sat down to look at it. It was a lovely piece of work. She gazed at it as an artist would look with delight on a Sanzio or a Murillo. Then she proceeded to put it on, having first put on boots, etc. As she did so she became happy. A charming bonnet was soon donned, and she drew on a pair of crimped gloves. She looked at the reflection of a very pretty and very well-dressed woman.

‘Fit for the Queen’s drawing-room,’ was her mental comment, Jennie’s ideas anent drawing-room attire being a trifle hazy.

She forgot herself for a moment and turned round, as if about to walk off with Jim. Where was Jim? Alas! her jealous mind answered that question only too readily. Again the storm of passion rose, but it was gulped down. No silly tear-drops should soil that dress. She turned and looked at herself once more, and smiled and admired until her feelings were calmed. Well, she would go out for a walk. But no money—what a brute Jim was!

Now, Jim looked on himself as most lavish towards his wife. The truth is, she was dreadfully extravagant. Whenever Jim was in a particularly good humour she always got a new dress out of him. He remembered the cost of everything of this kind, while she didn’t, and he reckoned that per annum

her toilette came to more than is spent by the wife of many a man who is looked upon as a magnate. When Jim took her out on a holiday she paid nothing, and it never occurred to him that she might like to have a little ready money in her pocket.

The day was lovely. The brightest of sunshine showed off every detail of a nice frock. But she absolutely had not one single penny. Her forehead creased, her lips became set. She thought deeply. She went to the window and looked out. Where was Jim? She knew all his ways; she had noted the care with which he had dressed. A jealous spasm almost choked her. Then her face became hard and bitter.

‘What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander,’ said she.

Then she thought again, hesitated for a moment, looked at the scrap of paper thrown down by Jim, and finally sat down with pen, ink, and paper, and commenced to write as follows :

‘SIR,

‘Honesty is the best policy, and I will start by letting you know that I am a friend of the most wily detective in London. He has had to-day a visit from an enemy of yours, who has put him on to watch you. This enemy of yours is inclined to give you a great deal of trouble, and is in as nasty a state of mind as any man can be. The detective

whom I know is dangerous, and I take this opportunity of letting you know the same. I would be glad to see you at any place you appoint; and I would also be pleased to meet any trusted emissary from you, but it will be no use sending a messenger unless he brings two pounds as a sign or token that he really comes from you.

‘ I remain,

‘ Your most humble servant,

‘ X. Y. Z.

‘ P.S.—I am very much in want of money, and I shall give you the office all through if you deal with me properly.

‘ Please address, “ X. Y. Z., Post Office, 121, Malakoff Street, South Belgravia.” ’

She folded this fateful letter, and placed it in an envelope, which she addressed to Sir Louis Ventnor, Bart., 31, Crescent Street, Piccadilly.

She then called up the landlady, and proceeded to negotiate a loan. She succeeded in getting a florin only, for Jim always argued about repayment of such items. One would think that Jennie would have put by something out of her household expenses, and so she did, but she spent it as soon as she saved it, and then was penniless again.

She started on her lonely promenade; but, after leaving the room, she suddenly turned back, and walking to the open window, she passionately pushed down the flower-pot from which Jim had taken

his button-hole, and it fell with a crash on the pavement beneath, narrowly escaping the skull of a newly - civilized Somali who was passing beneath.

Jennie went out into the bright sunshine. She was admired by many, and became almost happy. She returned to a lonely dinner, and had to sit up late for Jim. He had much to tell her of business matters.

After a deep discussion, Jim lit a spirit-lamp under a small kettle, and said :

‘Now, dearie, an idle day to-morrow. Fetch the Jamaica.’

‘Oh, Jim,’ said she, ‘it’s only ten days since you had it last.’

‘No matter,’ said he, ‘I’m dead on for Jamaica to-night.’

He settled himself down to a brew of hot water, brown sugar, and Jamaica rum. Jim liked to consider himself the soberest and the hardest-headed man in the profession, and there was a great deal of truth in his contention. He possessed the power of drinking or not drinking as business required. He could sit down over any liquor with anyone, pretty certain that his boon companion would ultimately reach the garrulous stage while he himself would remain perfectly sober. No man had ever seen him even one sheet in the wind, let alone three. But there was one fluid which he could not resist, and that was old Jamaica rum. It was the only spirit

which could make him intoxicated, and perhaps for that reason it was the drink he loved most. Very seldom indeed did he indulge in it, and then only in company with Jennie, with whom he knew he was safe. He filled a glass for her, too. She sipped it very slowly, finishing half a glass as he got to his fifth. He then became very silly.

‘Pretty Jim! Handsome Jimmy!’ quoth he, with maudlin leers. ‘How can I help it? They will run after me. It’s not my fault.’

And then it appeared how wisely he acted in only tasting rum when in perfect safety, for his tongue began to wag very incautiously. Next day he remembered everything he had said up to a certain point, and after that memory was a blank. He asked Jennie, and she gave him a very long, and detailed, and inaccurate account of his sayings, while he got himself up in his best style. It was one of the few English holidays, and Jim was starting for Tunbridge Wells to commence investigations as to an important matter. He bade her an affectionate farewell, and she was left alone.

She proceeded to lay out all her dresses around the rooms, called up the landlady for a gossip, and borrowed half a crown. She then dressed and went for a walk. At Sloane Street she got on the box-seat of a ’bus. She could not help seeing the many glances of admiration directed towards her from the pavement. A well-dressed woman intensely enjoys riding on a drag or a mail phaeton, or in the front

seat of a 'bus. Of course, the pleasures differ in degree, but they are of the same kind.

It was a lovely day, and Jenny found her drive so pleasant that she forgot to get off at the place she intended to. The conductor came round for the fare, when she found that she had to pay a shilling, as it was a holiday long-distance bus. With many inward groans she paid the amount, and eventually found herself landed at Kew Bridge.

Now, London is a very large place, and includes several millions of human beings, and it so happened that on this morning the population of the Metropolis included Alphonse, erstwhile waiter at the Café Rococo. He was now Monsieur Alphonse. His room was a very handsome one, and a hairdresser was occupied in curling his thick black locks. He had had the luxury of a bath ; he had taken his roll and chocolate in bed ; and now, faultlessly attired, he proceeded to take a pick-me-up of chartreuse. His moustaches, darkened to the hue of jet, had been subjected to the coiffeur's art, and curled up to his eyelids ; his hat, his cane, his *boutonnière* were in good style. He looked in a long mirror, and saw a count of the ancient *régime*. He placed in his pocket a handsome cigar-case filled with real Havannas, and set forth, armed for conquest.

‘What a devil I am,’ thought he, ‘among these English ladies ! Poor things ! you have my pity, but you must worship me. That cannot be avoided.

It is fate—your fate, my fate. Ah! why was I not less handsome? Then I would not have caused so much unhappiness.'

Monsieur Alphonse had a very good conceit of himself.

As he walked along Piccadilly, he was about to hail a cab, when old instincts reasserted their sway, and he mounted an omnibus instead, which was bound for Kew Gardens. There was another 'bus a little way in front. In some of the many halts on the way the two vehicles got almost abreast, and Alphonse saw a very stylish-looking person on the other omnibus. His attention was attracted. He saw she was unaccompanied, and he immediately made up his mind to try and make her acquaintance.

On they went by Ravenscourt Park, on past the Duke's Walk, past classic Chiswick and rural Turnham Green, and finally landed at Kew Bridge.

Jennie dismounted, and proceeded to walk across the bridge in a cloud of dust, very annoying to anyone wearing a new bonnet. A stylish-looking man passed her, and walked a few yards in front. He was the only 'masher' to be seen, all the rest of the crowd being put down mentally by Jennie as tradespeople.

Alphonse strutted along. He puffed out his chest; he swaggered with arms akimbo; he tapped his patent leather boots, and all his fine airs only increased Jennie's admiration. They neared the

entrance of Kew Gardens, and Jennie was delighted to see half a dozen carriages waiting outside the gate, making it evident that some people of a higher class had arrived.

At this moment a magnificent barouche dashed up, drawn by two superb horses, and no one could avoid being struck by the amount of wealth and rank indicated by the turn-out. Alphonse raised his hat to the occupants when they were looking another way. Jennie noticed the salute, and her heart went down in her boots; for already she had been indulging in fanciful dreams that the gentleman might speak to her, but she now thought that he must be a duke at least to be on intimate terms with the owners of such a magnificent carriage.

Alphonse entered the gates a little in front of Jennie, and made his way into a building filled with specimens of timber. A close observer would have been surprised at the interest taken in this apparently dry subject by numbers of girls from fifteen to forty years of age, who were evidently not the frivolous beings misogynists consider them to be.

‘Ain’t it lovely!’ said one maiden with ostrich feathers, passing her hand over a polished section of *Pterocarpus Indicus*.

Alphonse was constantly just in front of Jennie, but carefully avoided meeting her until she should have admired him to his heart’s content. He then wandered in the grounds, and cleverly contrived so that, lounging along a narrow path among Hima-

layan rhododendrons, he suddenly met her face to face.

‘My dear marchioness,’ said he, raising his hat and warmly shaking hands with her. ‘I am so glad to meet you! Why, I have not seen you since the ball at the princess’s.’

Jennie was delighted at being mistaken for a marchioness, but began explaining that there was a mistake.

‘Ah,’ said Alphonse, ‘you do not remember me;’ and he presented his card, on which Jennie read, ‘Count Alphonse de Villers-Sexsell.’ ‘I have so many things to tell you,’ said he. ‘Allow me to take you to a seat.’

He escorted her to a bench beneath the thick shade of an *Æsculus Hippocastanum*, where Alphonse began a long farrago of nonsense detailing his doings during the last few years. Barons, marquises, dukes, and diamonds adorned his reminiscences.

Jennie felt almost dizzy at being in such high society. Then they strolled about, and finally made their way out and back over the bridge. At the other side was the Kew Star and Garter. They walked in, and went out on to the pretty lawn at the back, in which were a number of rustic summer-houses. A bottle of champagne and some ice appeared, which Jennie refused, putting on her best Sunday manners; but the Count appeared so distressed, and seemed to think it would be so much of an insult if she persisted in her refusal, that at length

she consented to take one glass, just to show there was no ill-feeling. Now, no one liked iced champagne better than Jennie. Not that she drank—by no means. She had much too great a regard for her complexion.

It was now half-past six o'clock, and the Count proposed that they should dine at the Woburn Restaurant in town. Had she ever been there? No. Ah! it was a place to see. A sight far before Delmonico's, and equal to the best in Paris. Jennie hesitated a good deal, and then she thought of what an evening she would spend at home, flattening her nose against the window-panes, staring at the passers-by. And what would Jim say? But what was Jim doing? This thought decided her. Jim's tongue had been loosened the previous evening.

'What is sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose,' said she to herself, so she agreed.

They trained to Victoria, and drove to the Woburn. A *huissier*, in a magnificent gold-laced uniform, bowed to the ground as they descended, when the Count conducted her to the ladies' room, where an obsequious attendant aided her in taking off her things, and 'My ladies' her continuously. The room was crowded with people, most of them in full dress, who seemed to Jennie to be duchesses at least. She, as women do, rose to the occasion, and felt that she conducted herself with all the hauteur necessary to a lady of title. As if by inspiration, her accent, and the tones of her voice, assumed an

elegance which she had never felt before. Having bestowed a glance at the mirror, she decided that she was looking her very best, and none of the duchesses could hold a candle to her for appearance. Already she found that she was beginning to be on an equality with them, and when she came out she felt that she had almost lost all fear of the big man in the gold lace. Alphonse offered his arm, and conducted her to a table, happily vacant, in a corner of a raised corridor running around the body of the dining-hall. A string band was playing selections from 'Cavalleria Rusticana'; the immense hall was a dream of Oriental magnificence; of cream colour and massive gilding. Several hundred ladies, many in brightest tinted dresses, were at dinner with handsome cavaliers.

Alphonse's selections from the *menu* were made with discrimination, as he knew all about it. He acted the Grand Seigneur to the best of his ability. His style, and his rudeness to the waiter, would have at once betrayed him, if Jennie had known more of the world. But she had come straight from the country; she had known no one of a better class than Jim, and he, though he had treated her to many a good dinner, preferred, when relaxing from his toils, to take his ease in an inn of a less pretentious nature than the grand caravanserai in which she was now seated.

The dinner was good. Inverting the Russian fashion, Alphonse finished with caviare. As Jennie

sipped a little glass of noyeau, she felt that she had had a good day. The great Silver Trumpet began his solo on the cornet. It was ravishing. Jennie was in just that state of mind in which music is most entrancing. Alphonse put her in a hansom, paid the cabman, and drove with her part of the way. She was to write to him, and he was to direct his letters to 'X. Y. Z., Post Office, 121, Malakoff Street, South Belgravia.'

'Your *bête* of a husband may be jealous,' said Alphonse. 'Well, listen to my words of wisdom. The great matter is to avoid the rousing of the first suspicions. People are careless at starting; then of what use is caution afterwards? I will give you back all your letters. It is no use my saying I will burn them; people always say that, and they invariably don't do it. Write freely, for you will get all your notes back again, and then you will burn them yourself and feel safe.'

When Jim returned next day there was a scene. He found his wife with eyes red and inflamed by continued weeping.

'Oh, Jim,' said she, clutching him, 'if you should cease to love me I should die!'

Jim felt that he had been rather inattentive to her, but he defended himself stoutly. She questioned him minutely as to all his doings, and Jim, who had a ready invention which she knew was in action, accounted for every moment of his time. He then set himself in earnest to the task of soothing and

calming her mind, and eventually brought smiles again to her lips, and the old brightness to her eyes. More than any other of his numerous talents, Jim prided himself on his thorough knowledge of feminine nature, and the way in which he could read to the bottom of a woman's soul. He took her to Victoria Station, Brighton side, and taking possession of a little table in a secluded corner, half hidden behind the entrance-porch, he treated her to a first-class dinner. Jim was in great spirits.

'I did that letter beautiful,' said he. 'Honesty is the best policy. She has come to terms. A 'undred a year. One 'undred per annum this 'ere cove is to have for playing into my lady's hands. It will take a smart man to do it, too, I can tell you, for I'll have to humour the husband very carefully. Pay me well, and I'm true—that's my motto.'

'Quite right, too,' said Jane.

She had come to terms about her own letter, and she was to have four pounds a month to keep a certain gentleman informed of every move against him.

CHAPTER XII.

PURFLEET.

SIR LOUIS and Mrs. Tacker sat together in that most perfect hostelry in Purfleet, gazing restfully at the broad and silvery Thames, which ran beneath the

window. The ocean breezes fanned their brows, and the air was filled with the melody of joyous song-birds.

‘And in Paris you loved that insipid girl.’

‘Let me forget,’ said Sir Louis.

‘You know she never cared a straw for you.’

‘Of that there can be no doubt.’

‘But did you love her? Did you? Did you?’

‘I did,’ said Sir Louis.

‘You did! If you say that again,’ said she fiercely, ‘I will box your ears!’ She raised her fist, and looked dangerous. Her hand was very small, but it was very thick and muscular, and her arms were immense. ‘Do you love her now?’

‘No, most decidedly not.’

‘Louis, there can be no love without jealousy. I feel a fierce jealousy.’

More than one tear dropped from her beautiful eyes as she threw herself on his shoulder, and sobbed.

Sir Louis placed his arm round her, and soothed her, as if she had been a baby. He then stroked her silky golden hair, and when her sobs ceased, which they soon did, he gently raised her face and gave her a warm, yet soothing kiss.

‘Oh, these moods of mine!’ she said, ‘I cannot help them.’

‘They are your greatest charm,’ said Sir Louis. ‘You melt in tears; you smile, and zephyrs of delight float over your beauty. You are sometimes

solemn as Solomon. What a born punster that man's godfather must have been! And then you occasionally talk sense. That startles and confounds one, and perfects your fascinations. It is like the little circle of dazzling red in Turner's pictures, and you show your true feeling of art by so seldom using this power which you occasionally possess.'

'What mood am I in now?' said she.

'If Milton could see you exactly as you are now—don't change, please; let not the slightest wave of feeling alter your expression—Milton would write a new sonnet. L'Allegro glides smilingly forward, while Il Penseroso is stealing away. And now you are in your gladsome mood, your eyes have an added brilliancy, your cheek—I beg your pardon—your cheeks a more fervid glow—more fervid, and yet more refined. That is what I've always wondered at—your complexion is so rich and yet so clear. Though rich, yet clear,' continued he; 'though gentle, yet not—not, not, not—I can't remember. Wasn't there some fellow wrote something about a river? That's the sort of thing I mean.'

'And you will always be faithful to me, Louis?'

'We will be true to each other.'

'Oh, Loo, there's nothing half so sweet in life as—as what?'

'As youthful friendship,' said Ventnor.

'I am so happy,' said she. 'It is like one of Chateaubriand's idylls, and being thrown on a desert

island. We are ten miles from any place ; ten miles from London, ten miles from Tilbury, the Thames a mile wide in front, with marshes beyond, and behind us nothing but chalk-pits.'

'But is the place always so empty?'

'Oh no ; at certain times of the year Purfleet is full.'

'You've been here before?'

'Oh no, never ; but I've heard a good deal of it.'

'It's very quiet, certainly.'

'And look, Loo, at that beautiful ship at the other side, with the pretty white spots.'

'Yes,' said Sir Louis, 'that is a genuine old seventy-four—one of the most graceful objects in the world. I fancy it must be a training-ship.'

'Why did you go away to all these horrid places?' said Mrs. Tacker.

'I had to go,' said he, 'through a misfortune which was not my fault. Yet circumstances were so much against me that I could not have rejoined my old set, except as a baronet. To a title much is forgiven.'

'And do you feel changed now that you are among your own kind again?'

'I feel as if transformed, or, rather, I feel as one who had been, through some foul witchcraft, made into some lower animal, and had suddenly regained his identity. Let us walk round.'

There was a detachment of infantry as a garrison at Purfleet, with a few old guns. Some half-hour before

Mrs. Tacker, with a little telescope which she always carried in her portmanteau, had from an upper room taken a look through his open window at the subaltern, second in command. The room he occupied was very different from the sumptuous apartments pictured by novelists. In fact, the whole quarters, including the rickety staircase, if existing in another part of the Empire, would have shown a striking want of energy on the part of the Station Staff officer and Executive Engineer. This officer sat with his fevered hands clasping his throbbing brow. Thirty-eight books were before him, piled as a parapet in the form of a lunette, with a three-feet gorge. Another book lay open before him. He was reading for the Staff College, and for four months he had not once left Purfleet. This was grand for his captain, who spent the whole time in town. Usually the two officers exiled to the dismal solitude of Purfleet take leave on alternate days.

Sir Louis and Mrs. Tacker walked round. She was surprised at seeing the marked contrast between the neatness, and smartness, and cleanliness of a soldier as seen in the street, and his dishevelled style in a barrack-yard. They turned up a winding walk towards the railway-station.

‘Andsome man,’ said the cook.

‘Ain’t he,’ said a pretty housemaid. ‘Bride and bridegroom, I expects.’

‘What a shame, and she old enough to be ’is mother!’

‘I’ll go bail she’s got lots of money.’

A train ran in, with a long string of carriages filled with Russian Jews. They looked spectral and as if in the last stages of famine, with wild eyes ravenously seeking for food, skeleton faces, and rags and filth unutterable. They looked like a hoard of famished savage fleas leaping to fasten on John Bull.

‘I must not stay much longer,’ said Mrs. Tacker as the train moved off. ‘I want to be early at the dance.’

‘What dance?’ said Sir Louis.

‘The dance at Woolwich.’

‘At Woolwich? Then we had better look sharp. We are not far from Woolwich here, as the crow flies; but to get to it we have to travel up this side by the Thames for miles and miles, cross over to another line, wait perhaps an hour for a train, and then down the other side of the river, miles and miles again, to Woolwich. There are no bridges down here, remember.’

They hurried into the hotel, and found there was no train up from Purfleet for six hours. Very few trains stop there.

Mrs. Tacker was in despair.

‘Oh, Louis!’ said she, ‘can’t you do something? I have never been at a gunner’s dance in England, and theirs is always the best of all; and the Knight-Bartons will be there, and that odious Mrs. Bellairs, and everybody. And, besides, I want to go most particularly.’

‘Have you engaged a room in Woolwich?’ said he, ‘for they are hard to get when a dance is on. I got a card for it myself, I think.’

‘Yes,’ said she. ‘I have engaged a room on the Common.’

‘Telegraph to your maid to bring down your dress. I’ll get you there, somehow.’

‘You seem to know these places very well,’ said she.

‘I knew them very well indeed before I went away,’ said Ventnor.

He walked into the bar, and asked for a boat.

Not one was to be had for love or money. Boats came there in the Purfleet season, but now not one could be had.

He then ordered a trap.

The landlord and his family had gone on a trip to Tilbury, and had taken all the horses.

Ventnor thought for a few minutes. He then searched all about until he found a long pole. He went to the little post-office and general shop, and bought a ball of twine and some handkerchiefs. He rigged up a loop at the end of the pole, took a handkerchief, rolled it up into a little lump, the size of a walnut, tying a string to it, which twine he passed through the loop at the top of the pole. He then went upstairs and got out on the roof, held up the pole, and pulled the cord, so that the handkerchief was slowly drawn to the top of the pole. Then, by a jerk, he caused it to fly out to the breeze. He re-

peated this operation several times with different handkerchiefs.

A flag was broken out from the old seventy-four.

Ventnor went down to Mrs. Tacker, and told her all would be well.

At that moment the man-of-war's cutter was seen approaching, pulled by eight lusty young sea-dogs. An officer was steering.

Ventnor went down to the water's edge.

'Sir,' said he to the ship's officer, 'I wish to speak to you on a matter of importance,' and he presented his card. 'Will you splice the main brace?'

Now, splicing the main brace means having a drink.

The officer agreed, and they walked up to the hotel, and proceeded to splice. Ventnor then stated that he wished to be rowed across the river.

'Ahem,' said the officer, slightly flushing. 'Her Majesty's boats are not ferries.'

'Certainly not,' said Ventnor; 'but there is to be to-night a meeting in Woolwich of four hundred officers of the army. It is the most important meeting of the kind which has been held for years. There will be representatives of the heavies, hussars, lancers, guards, rifles, line, mounted infantry, field guns, gallopers, and the floral chariot. It is absolutely necessary that I should be there.'

'If it's a military matter,' said the officer, 'the boat and crew are at your service.'

‘Did I meet you in ’Frisco?’ said Sir Louis. ‘It seems as if I’d seen your face somewhere.’

‘I was in ’Frisco three years after I joined,’ said the officer.

Then they began talking about Wampum Avenue and the Montezuma Hotel. When two old travellers begin comparing notes they are soon friends. Mrs. Tacker appeared on the scene. The sailor was introduced and charmed. The boat spun across the river, swishing through the water. Louis gave the stroke oarsman a sovereign for the ship’s sports. They landed at Erith, and three warmer friends never parted than they were, as Sir Louis and Mrs. Tacker entered a train which ran them direct into Woolwich.

There was a sound of revelry by night, and the electric light shone bright over fair women and the usual lot of men that one meets everywhere. Kitty Browne sat on a sofa in a room apart, talking to Mr. Clanbourne, a city magnate of great wealth, who for some time had paid her a great deal of attention. He was making up his mind to ask for a quadrille, when Mr. Caldwyn came up and asked her to dance.

An hour before this Miss Browne had declared that her card was full. This may have been a fiblet, or it may not. At all events, she went off with him, and, passing a mirror, it struck her that they were the handsomest pair in the room. He was about

six-and-twenty. When thoughtful, he looked much more; when happy, he sometimes seemed to be almost a boy.

He was developing a great invention, which might make him very rich. That very day a promoter had brought him into business relations with a moneyed man, who seemed disposed to advance the capital required for the completion of his patent. At length he saw wealth within his possible grasp, and, as he looked down at the beautiful girl beside him, fervid dreams whirled through his brain.

Was Miss Browne a flirt? No, most certainly not. At least, that is to say, she never had flirted in her life—or, perhaps, ‘hardly ever’ would be the more correct phrase. And yet she knew that she was about to do all possible to make this individual on whose arm she leaned fond of her. He was a man, that was one thing, and the arm which encircled her waist was like Bessemer steel. She asked him about the two years he had spent at sea. She loved the sea (as seen from the beach). Her eyes, as she looked up, had a soft and tender tinge, and as they met his they dropped.

The dance ended, they walked to the same place where she had sat before in the secluded room. They spoke of each other, and their ideas reciprocated. There was a tension in the air. Each felt as if it was the sort of an occasion in which a man might make a proposal of marriage.

‘And you are losing so many of your old English

customs,' said she, 'and we in the United States follow your lead. How nice it must have been in the days long gone by to get valentines! I have never had one.'

'Let me write you one,' said he, 'on the back of your programme.' He took the card, and she yielded it with a blush. 'Give me a word, then you will know it is impromptu. Stay, have you got a second name?'

'I have several Christian names,' said Miss Browne.

'Then tell me the first that occurs to you.'

'Rebecca.'

'Rebecca? In what metre shall it be? Or, still better, mention any air you wish, and I will write new words to it.'

'I really cannot decide on an air. Well, let me think of the oldest I can remember. Have you ever heard "Zitella," the air which Rip Van Winkle sang in the Catskill Mountains?'

He thought for a few moments, and then wrote rapidly:

Air, 'Zitella.'

'Ever and always I dream of that night
When, a bright blaze of beauty, you flashed on my sight.
I, as a gay son of a *sans souci* race,
Ne'er dreamed I'd be conquered by beauty and grace.
But all my bright joyousness vanished that day,
And deep fiery sighs now drive laughter away.
Lovely Rebecca, think how I feel,
Here at thy beck, a suitor, I kneel.

Haughty Rebecca, turn not away,
See how I tremble at each word I say.
Would that blest tears my hot cheeks could lave.
The rover is trammelled, the free-lance a slave.
Whirlwinds of feeling rush wild o'er my brow :
Look on me, pity me, come to me now.
 Darling Rebecca, think how I feel,
 Here at thy beck, a suitor, I kneel.'

She read the lines, tore the card in two, and dropped the pieces on the floor.

He bowed, turned on his heel, and left the room.

'Snubbed !' thought Mr. Simkin, who just then entered. 'Oh, Miss Bwowne, bai Jove, you know, I saw you dancing with that fellow Caldwyn. I never did like him. Something unmanly about him. Rather what I call a milksop, you know.'

Miss Browne looked round the eye-glass, and saw the little man. She felt intensely inclined to give him a whipping and send him to bed without his supper, but she only asked him to get her a cup of tea, which he did in the most objectionable manner possible.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GRANDEE.

LORD OUDENARDE had dined with Sir Louis Ventnor in Crescent Street, and they sat smoking and talking very earnestly.

‘It will be not the slightest trouble to me,’ said Sir Louis. ‘You know that as well as I do.’

‘It cannot be,’ said his friend. ‘It is many years since I became a poor lord, and I have learned to make financial calculations. I should have to pay you some day, and I can only do that by proceeding as I am about to act. I shall have to leave the regiment, and live the life of a miser, until I shall have paid Jacob Moses, from whom I can get the amount.’

‘But, Oudenarde, what are six thousand pounds to a man in your position?’

‘Ah, my dear Louis, you little know what that position is.’

‘But, Oudenarde, do you know, old man, I should not in the least have thought you to be a person who would lose such a sum at cards?’

‘There is where you make the mistake. The gambling devil within is strong. I have long kept it chained, but it was there all the time.’

‘Was all lost at the same place?’

‘Yes; Mark’s Place, St. Panym Street.’

‘Are you quite certain the play was all on the square?’

‘Oh, certainly; the Marquess is a grandee of Spain. There can be no sham in this case—he is received at the Embassy.’

‘Is he a desperate gambler?’ said Sir Louis.

‘Yes; but men win and lose much more money than that without any hint of unfair dealings.’

‘Any other big sums lost?’

‘The Marquess himself loses most of all,’ said Oudenarde.

‘To whom?’

‘To anyone.’

‘Any other you know lost heavily?’

‘Lots; Tuft lost eight thousand,’ said his lordship.

‘Who is he?’

‘A newly-joined sub. in the tin tummies.’

‘That means nothing. We all know they are equally free with their money and their blood, as many a campaign has shown. Has the grandee lost heavily to anyone you know intimately?’

‘No.’

‘I think he called on me,’ said Sir Louis, ringing for his servant, who brought the required card, on which appeared the name of

‘EL MARQUES DE VILLATOYA,

‘Y Tobarra y Callasparra,

‘Y Villar-Robleda.’

‘And he is a Grandee of Spain?’

‘Yes,’ said Oudenarde.

‘What a daring stroke it would be to get hold of a real grandee and start a hell in Piccadilly! Let us go and see how things stand there.’

After twenty minutes’ earnest conversation they started. They had not far to go, so they proceeded on foot, and turned down St. Panym Street. As

they neared their destination, a man wearing a Buffalo Bill hat left the house they were about to enter.

‘Now I almost understand,’ whispered Sir Louis. They gave their names to a servant, who showed them up to the grandee’s room.

The Marquess came forward effusively to meet Oudenarde, and in excellent English expressed his pleasure in meeting any friend of his lordship’s.

Sir Louis measured the Marquess with a glance. He certainly did not in the least resemble a professional gambler. He was tall, but much too stout for his height; in fact, he was a very fat man. He seemed to ripple all over with good-nature, good-humour, and good living. The insignia of three orders were on his evening coat, and he welcomed Sir Louis to his domicile with a mixture of Spanish grace, French *camaraderie*, and the genuine hospitality of Arabia Felix.

The Marquess and his friends had been finishing their coffee and cigars; the new arrivals were asked to join in a gloria, after which all adjourned to the next room.

‘My lord, you have come for your revenge?’ said the Marquess.

‘Well, not to-night; I am due at Lady Blanche’s, and I must show up early.’

‘So am I,’ said the jovial Spaniard; ‘but two o’clock will be quite time enough for me. I must

have my picture-book regularly. Will Sir Louis join us at baccarat ?'

'I never play any game which does not require skill; besides, I have almost forsworn cards; in fact, I have registered a mental vow to play very seldom.'

'You are most wise,' said the Marquess. 'I always warn everyone against cards. If you give way to the passion you cannot live without your game. Look at me—what I have come to. If I were starving I would stake my last crust. If I were to be executed for high treason I should play with the headsman.'

'Try a few games with the Marquess,' said Oudenarde. 'I shall not play to-night. I will look in at Lady Blanche's, and come back here in two hours.'

Sir Louis agreed. They sat down at *écarté* for small points. The Marquess ordered champagne, and Sir Louis and he began to drink very freely.

Sir Louis saw without pretending to observe. He perceived that the Marquess was not a good player, and he saw that there must be a mystery somewhere. But where? Sir Louis had seen a good deal of foul play, and knew all the tricks of cheating; but none of these were evident, even to his trained eye. Louis was a good actor, and soon the apparent excitement of his manner, and his flushed brow, made it seem as if champagne and the lust of play had mastered him.

After two very exciting games, Ventnor paused. He, as if mechanically, stretched out his hand for more champagne; the bottle was empty. A servant at once placed another on a large solid table within easy reach. Sir Louis's glass had been changed for a soda-water tumbler. He filled out and drank a deep bumper.

'Marquess,' said he, 'it is long since I had a real night's play. I would propose to you to have a little more excitement, but with one proviso. I may have to leave London to-morrow for a considerable period. Let it be understood that there be no revenge.'

'As you please, señor,' said the grandee. 'I only play for the sake of play—for nothing else.'

'Then, I propose that we play in sets of three games. The first for five, the second for fifty, the third for five hundred pounds, and to continue doing so until two o'clock. Then let all play cease, with no revenge.'

'Agreed,' said Villatoga. 'I agree to anything, only let us play. I am passionated for my charmers.'

Real play then commenced. Oudenarde returned, but one look at the faces over the little card-table kept him silent. The baccarat players felt the magnetic influence, and lowered their voices; in fact, they seemed much more interested in the *écarté* table than in their own.

The games went on with varying fortunes until the clock on the mantelpiece murmured two. They

played out their hands. Then the I O U's were placed on the table, and Ventnor began reckoning up his accounts. He took out his cheque-book.

'You can cash this to-morrow at 9.45,' said he. 'And, by the way, Oudenarde, it's just as well to make one account of these two small sums. I will include your losses in this cheque with my own. You can settle with me when your rents come in.'

'Agreed,' said Oudenarde. 'In fact, with this new squadron drill and new sword exercise commencing on Tuesday, I may not be able to get my regular revenge for months. I cannot give a night to play.'

'If you don't mind?' said Ventnor to Villatoga interrogatively.

'I agree to anything,' said the host, calling a servant to bring a despatch-box, and getting out a bundle of I O U's.

Sir Louis handed them to Oudenarde, who counted them and examined his signatures, while Ventnor drew a cheque.

Oudenarde handed the I O U's back to Ventnor, who rolled them into a spill, and placed them in the barrel of a revolver as he stood up.

'The first man puts his hand near that cheque, or near his pockets, I shall send these papers, ballasted, through his heart. I always shoot to kill. Señor,' said he, 'you play a worse game by a full point than I do, yet you won every big game, as every time you retained the exact card which took mine. You lost every small game, though frequently you could have

won it. You are rogues without the skill of rogues. Call yourselves first-class swindlers? D——n your impudence!

‘Johnny Mulligan,’ continued he, ‘is it long since you left Wampum Avenue?—I often saw you there, Johnny! Do you remember the English captain who gave you a ten-dollar piece for bringing him luck—the first gold you ever had, Johnny? Johnny, I am just going to send three bullets through the vase, because you’re not in it.’

‘I am in it, Captain,’ said a microphonic voice.

‘Then come out of it, John,’ said Sir Louis, ‘for my finger might tremble.’

With trained agility a small gentleman ten times the height of a teacup vaulted out of a vase. He strode along the larger table, and held out his hand affably to Sir Louis.

‘You always were a divil at cards, Johnny.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Mulligan, stroking his chin thoughtfully, ‘but my mother didn’t like it. How did you know I was in the vase, Captain?’

‘Well, I knew you were exhibited at St. James’s Hall three months ago and then vanished, and I passed your father downstairs.’

‘Yes, Captain, smallest man in the world—five inches under Tom Thumb. First dwarf measured by a vernier scale. Proud of my stature.’

‘You press the button, and they know the card?’

‘Exactly, Captain.’

‘Good-bye, Mr. Mulligan. Now, Oudenarde, left

turn, march ; I'll be rear-guard. This cheque we will tear up. And now, señor Marquess, I would recommend a hansom to Victoria and the next train to Dover.'

The two friends walked downstairs, took a cab to the Ibis club, and smoked and talked until daybreak.

CHAPTER XIV

A DISCOVERY.

OUR old friend Athos sat in the Café Rococo. It was the absinthe hour, the evening was damp, and he felt unsociable, so he had taken a seat inside in an angle of the room, when he heard a voice exclaim :

'Athos, dear boy, how fortunate I am to encounter you at once !'

Athos looked up and saw a man, with a short, black, shaggy beard, a complexion scorched to a walnut hue, and dressed very roughly in karkee. Athos regarded him at first with surprise, then, with a little glad cry of joy, he sprang from his chair, threw his arms round the new arrival, and kissed him with great tenderness.

'Aramis, dear friend,' said he, 'you are safe, you are returned, you have survived all the dangers of the desert. Paris once more has the happiness of possessing you. How black you are—and your

dress !—but it is droll ! *Garçon !* Monsieur Aramis will dine with me in the little green room, as we have much to say to each other.'

Aramis was delighted to once more find himself in his beloved Paris. He had a great deal to tell. Among his many adventures there was one to be described in minute detail. He had painted a rajah, and the picture was one of his best works. The light of the harem took a fancy to have her portrait also, and insisted that a female artist should paint it. The rajah was worried out of his life, as no lady painter could be got, and, as the princess was behind the purdah, of course Aramis could never see her. Aramis's kitmeghar's cousin's wife was tanni-katch in the harem kitchen, and gossip circulated. Aramis hit on a plan. He was to see the beauty in a mirror, and paint her reflection. In front of him was placed a huge ancient iron shield, with a small hole pierced in it through which he could see her features in the mirror. The reflection was so transcendently lovely that Aramis fell frantically in love. His tale was full of romantic adventures. They had to fly on fleet dromedaries. His history during his absence was most interesting.

Then they sat smoking in an upper room, with windows reaching to the floor. Before them was the Eiffel Tower, illuminated by brilliant moonlight. Then they spoke of that former evening, and Aramis found that he had much to learn. He scorned the idea of Dunne having anything to do with the extra-

ordinary event, even though Dunne himself had vanished.

'*Ma foi !*' said he, 'for a week before I started I announced my approaching departure in every possible way, so that there might not be a third mysterious disappearance.'

'A fourth,' said Athos, 'for Alphonse, the waiter, vanished also.' Then he began a long recital.

Gunnis Sing, the Prince's great friend, had come to see him from the valley of the Rhine. He had died, but not before Athos had learned to know him well and to value him greatly. He was a fine fellow, brave, high-spirited, refined, clever, well-educated, and of an ancient family. He was very wealthy, and was in despair at the loss of Yussuff. When he found himself dying he left by his will a sum of twenty-five thousand francs reward to anyone who would cause the conviction of the guilty party, and an annuity of five thousand francs a year to be spent in seeking proofs, the search to continue, if necessary, for four years; Athos to be executor of the will.

Athos, after much consultation, had put the matter in the hands of a Monsieur Brisure, a detective well known in his profession, and who had impressed Athos as being a man of great shrewdness.

'And now, my dear Aramis,' said he, 'I come to one or two strange coincidences. I changed my rooms, and only after I had been some time settled in my new quarters did I discover that I actually

inhabited the suite which formerly belonged to Dunne. He had only been there for three months, and you know our habits. We met each other at clubs or assemblies. I had been in his old place, but not in this new one, and I never had occasion to write to him there, as he had his club address on his card. There was no trace of him in this flat. I took it furnished, through a notary, who afterwards, quite accidentally, told me the name of the previous occupant. As I have said, there was nothing to indicate who the former proprietor was. The name of Dunne was not anywhere to be seen; but one day I picked up from under a chest of drawers an envelope addressed to Sir Louis Ventnor. I thought little of this, as it conveyed nothing to my mind, but I took it to Brisure, who seemed surprised at seeing it. He admitted that he had heard the name before, and said, "I have been watching him since his wonderful escape to England." He then suddenly became reticent, and would say no more. Twice since have I gone to see him, but he will tell me nothing. He says that he has secured information that may lead to a clue or may not, that he cannot say anything at present, and that the envelope gave him no new information.

'I must tell you, *mon cher*, that I have much more reason to be interested in the fate of Prince Yussuff than you are at present aware. Ah, he was a fine fellow! What a horseman! what an athlete! What a bold player! what a dashing *bon diable*!

But he was more than that, much more. He went, I tell you, and did good among the poor of Paris. There was old Nanon Rappard. Her husband was dying, and she was on the brink of starvation. How Yussuff knew of this, I know not, but he saved her life, and made her old man's end happy. And Nanon had once, when I was a child, been our servant, and saved the life of my mother when we all had fever. I weep when I think of my own remissness and Yussuff's nobility. But, my friend, he acted as a good providence on another occasion. On a certain day I, your friend who speaks to you, was about to end my life to save my honour, which demanded eight thousand francs, and I had them not. I had already loaded my revolver, when a parcel was handed in containing the money.'

'And you did not tell me, Athos,' said Aramis, his head bowed on his hand.

'What use in doing that? Did I not know your banking account? If you had had it, I would have asked it; but you had nothing. However, I was saved. I thought it was from a lady, whom you know of, but whom I never mention. How she could have heard of my difficulty I could not tell; but when some time afterwards I took her the repayment of the debt, she knew nothing of it. It was Yussuff, I tell you, Aramis—it was the Prince who had saved my life and my honour. Estelle had told him of my difficulty.'

'You will easily imagine that I am most anxious

to clear up the mystery of his death. The police did not do their duty properly at first. I have only recently discovered that, opening off the stairs, in the central column of the tower, is a chamber, near the top, large enough to contain four men; and there are other similar chambers on the way up. These are to admit of artisans, in going up and others going down, crossing each other. Again, several times after the Tower was closed for painting, a man with a large black beard had bribed the foreman to let him put on a workman's blouse, and proceed to the top for the alleged purpose of taking photographs of clouds. Twice, at least, he had gone up at night. But, *mon Dieu!* how long we have talked! They are closing the house. I will go with you. Breakfast with me here to-morrow at one o'clock.'

They left the house together.

Next day, after breakfast, they sat discussing the subject of their previous evening's conversation. Athos said that he was not contented with Brisure. The man appeared to do nothing, and to have no ideas.

'He seemed much surprised on seeing the envelope?' asked Aramis.

'Most decidedly,' said Athos; 'so much so that I supposed we were on the brink of some great discovery. Yet nothing came of it.'

'Have you got the missive still?' said Aramis.

'There it is,' said Athos, taking it from a pocket-book and throwing it across the table.

Aramis took the envelope, and examined it carefully on both sides. He looked inside, and then, as if acting mechanically and without thinking, he tore open the flaps, so as to spread the whole surface out, as it was before it was folded up and gummed. A tiny slip of paper fell out.

‘This is English, I think,’ said Aramis. ‘You can read it.’

Athos took it, and saw that it was a cutting from a newspaper, and read :

‘At his residence, 31, Crescent Street, Sir Vivian Ventnor, aged forty-four.’

‘What does this mean?’

‘We must get a Peerage,’ said Athos.

‘A Peerage! It is not an easy thing for you or for me to become a Peer of France.’

‘A Debrett, a Burke. I will tell you where we can see one—at the Café Americain.’

‘What made you think of opening out the envelope?’ continued Athos.

‘Ladies, my dear Athos, will, in spite of the new higher education, write most important items on the interiors of envelopes, so I have got into the habit of inspecting all covers inside and out, even to tearing them open so as to be flat.’

At the Café Americain they procured a Peerage, and found the following :

‘Ventnor, Sir Vivian James Charles ; fifth bart. ; born 1824 ; married Lady Louisa Elizabeth Mary, daughter of Earl of

Dumfarlane. Issue, Vivian Charles James ; born 1848 ; Francis, 1851 ; George Joseph, 1852.'

'This explains everything,' said Aramis. 'Dunne was a cousin. He is now Sir Louis, and has returned to England to claim his inheritance.'

'The hour of the *dénouement* is approaching. I am not satisfied with Brisure. See, all this time is passed, and he has done nothing. Let us go and see him.'

Arrived at Brisure's office, Athos introduced Aramis, and told of his discoveries.

'All these things I already know,' said Brisure. 'Mr. Louis Ventnor left England eighteen years ago under a cloud. There was a movement in the Helix Club that strong notice should be taken of his conduct ; but this idea was not carried out, for some people, and notably Lord Oudenarde, maintained his innocence. On the death of his cousin he returned and took possession of his estates. It may be possible to convict him, but I warn you this will be a matter of great difficulty. He is an uncommonly clever man. Of course, he must be watched. This duty I put in the hands of an English detective, Monsieur James Stemming' (writing name and address on a card). 'This is a very sharp fellow ; he impressed me very favourably. I did not inform you of all these facts, because what do they amount to ? Nothing. Monsieur Dunne was before the magistrate here in Paris, on a charge which was dismissed for want of proof. There was nothing in

his life in Paris which could be brought against him. I have now been watching him for some time, and found nothing.

‘You now, gentlemen, have the results so far of my endeavours to solve a very difficult problem. You have also, as a matter of course, my resignation of all connection with the case. I can have nothing more to do with it ; but we part friends. Your impatience was very natural, and at some future time, after you have taken the matter into your own hands and made the usual amateur’s bungle of the whole affair, come back to me, put the business implicitly in my care once more, and I shall be prepared to assist you. *Au plaisir de vous revoir*, gentlemen. Good-morning.’

Brisure, however, with all his frankness, did not tell them that he had recognised the former waiter of the Café Rococo, Alphonse, in London, and that he had seen him in company with a very stylish woman. Brisure had put on a spy to ascertain who this lady was, but for this purpose he had selected another myrmidon, and not Mr. James Stemming.

Athos, who had overstayed his lunch hour, returned to his bank. In the evening the friends met in the rooms which formerly belonged to Dunne.

‘I have made very little change,’ said Athos, as he showed Aramis over the suite. ‘This room, you see, is a well-fitted-up laboratory, which belonged to Dunne, who, as you perceive, was a very scientific

person. In this science is, depend upon it, the solution of the problem. So certain am I of it, that I have devoted myself to the study of chemistry. Three days each week I am visited by an Englishman, who teaches me the Atomic Theory, and qualitative analysis. I am astonished at my own learning. Ah, dear boy, if it would only help me at the board of green cloth! I must tell you that even since this morning I have made my plan of campaign. I shall go to London. To get to that city on business will be easy, as we have immense interests over there. I shall encounter this man and proclaim who he is. This will not be done without all due precautions. I will ask the English Government to take the case up and prosecute him, since Yussuff was an English subject.'

'*Mon cher,*' said Aramis, 'this will not be the easy matter you imagine. Of what can you accuse him? Of nothing. Or will you reproach him with having joined us in many joyous evenings, of having sat at the same table, eaten the same salt, and enjoyed with us a happy *camaraderie*? Athos, can it be that this man is a murderer? No, it is impossible. I liked him. He had been so long in the States that he was more American than the Americans themselves. And then he was so calm, so shrewd, so contented, so happy. It is not such men who become criminals.'

'You reason from your own good heart. We are all unwilling to believe that a person who has been

our friend could commit a crime. But remember that in the country where he had lived for years the mere shooting of a man is not looked upon as a matter of very great consequence. Besides, consider the discoveries of the trial. Our friend had been a millionaire. There is nothing impossible in a wealthy man, a model of respectability while his money lasts, becoming when he loses all a desperado. Your other views are, however, most undoubtedly correct. We have no proof. Science concealed results, and science must unveil them.'

'And the accomplices must be found.'

'True,' said Athos; 'in that direction lies the road to discovery.'

CHAPTER XV.

CRIME.

JIM STEMMING, in the meantime, saw and found out and prospered. He had been employed in several minor affairs and been uniformly successful. His connection was expanding, his name becoming known, his knowledge of human nature was more extended, he was becoming more and more familiar with the by-ways of crime, his sources of secret information were enlarged, and the accumulated recollections of a long series of successes gave a daring and firmness to his combinations and a

clearness to his forecasts which ensured good fortune. Jennie continued to be of the greatest use.

In the meantime the French lessons went on famously. Jim was a born detective. He could throw his whole soul into anything connected with his business. He read Gaboriau, studying each book with maps. He had studied the map of London until he knew it all over. Maps became a passion with him. Each new job he got, he went straight to Cockspur Street and got the ordnance maps of the county. In an hour he could have every road and path and by-way in a circle five miles in diameter stamped on his mind. He got a map of Paris and a guide. He covered quires of foolscap paper with sketches of the different quarters of that city. He got the map not only on paper, but in his mind. He localized the chief cafés, the police-stations, the theatres, the railway-stations; he studied Baedeker. He began to feel that he knew Paris.

But no one knew better than Jim that the idea of a place created by maps or books is often quite different from the reality. He must go there. Now, Jim had a strong dislike to travelling without being paid for doing so. He thought out a scheme. He decided that he had a substratum of real knowledge, on which assurance, quickness, and tact, might easily rear the necessary superstructure; so he took a favourable opportunity, and called on the detective chief, to lay before him his wish for

French business, or a case which might lie in both countries.

‘But,’ said the chief, ‘you should know French, and be able to make your way about.’

Jim told him that he had been born in Paris, and lived there until the age of twelve, and that more recently, when eighteen, he had gone there as groom to a sporting gentleman, who had come to grief, leaving Jim to shift for himself, which he did by filling in rapid succession about twenty different places in as many different parts of the city. This fictitious account he accompanied by such a whirlwind of names of faubourgs, quarters, boulevards, squares, streets, alleys, cafés, casinos, kiosks, and accounts of the customs of the country, that the chief got bewildered.

‘Well,’ said he, ‘it so happens that there is a Frenchman here who has asked me to take up a case which began in Whitechapel, and will probably end in France. I’ll have him in.’

The Frenchman entered and stated his case. Jim took up the running, and, commencing with one place in Paris mentioned by the Frenchman, described every street of any consequence within a quarter of a mile of it. He then digressed, and began relating his own apocryphal experiences, and the places where he had lived all over the city.

‘It is extraordinaire,’ said monsieur. ‘I am myself a Parisian, and here is this gentlemans who knows of Paris more than I do.’

Jim got the job, and was completely successful. He spent a fortnight in Paris. He was delighted to find that almost at once he found himself at home. He required no map, except the one he carried in his brain. With this and his compass he made his way about. By the end of that fortnight he knew Paris as well as he knew London. He was delighted with the study of its beauty, and of its crimes. There is a glamour about the City of Light which gripped his fancy. One day he sat in the Café Rococo. He had read of the Eiffel mystery. The sight of the Tower brought all the details to his mind, and he thought of it a good deal.

Jim felt very elate. From Paris he wrote several times to Jenny; he had left her in charge of all his business in London. She opened his letters, and, as her handwriting was almost indistinguishable from his, she very often answered them too. Jim knew his work could not be in safer hands. He wrote her very long letters, for Jim had a fluent pen, and he bragged of his cleverness, and gave her full details of the crimes on whose traces he came. Jennie lived a very pleasant life during his absence. She had lots of pocket-money, thanks to a certain gentleman of high position to whom she supplied information, and the Count de Villers-Saxel escorted her to several good plays.

The day she received Jim's letter from the Café Rococo was that immediately preceding the date on which should arrive the monthly allowance paid for

information. She considered this a good opportunity, and sent a *précis* of Jim's letter. She received in answer a note asking her to be at a certain place at a certain time, and forward details of everything, even the most minute, connected with the Eiffel Tower affair, and enclosing an extra present of ten pounds. Alphonse, too, seemed greatly interested in her account of Jim's letter. Soon afterwards he said :

‘Charming lady, I have been considering a certain point which will be of great importance. I speak of the law of divorce as it is in our countries ; in France it is now quite simple. You must leave this nation, divorce your husband, and become Countess de Villers-Saxel. For me it will be necessary to possess the sanction of my father, the Duke. Now, my angel, let us act like people who understand business. I have heard of a good lawyer whom I shall consult. You must have your own counsel. We shall not delay any longer, but as soon as your husband returns our plans will be formed, and we shall act as recommended by our legal adviser. When my good father goes to a better world you will be a duchess.’

This proposal gave Jennie plenty to think of during Jim's prolonged absence. He returned jubilant to find Jennie very affectionate, but, indeed, he did not remark her closely. A number of new small jobs had come in during his absence, and Jennie's manipulations of old cases left nothing to

be desired. His business was becoming a lucrative one, and all went well. Still he sighed for a *cause célèbre*.

One day he was in his office when a knock came to the street-door. It was Athos, who had called. Jim directly saw that he was a Frenchman, and addressed him at once in that language with astonishing fluency. Athos opened on the subject of the Eiffel crime, and found that Jim already knew every inch of the ground, and also displayed a knowledge of the streets of Paris which was surprising. Asked how long he had been in Paris, Jim said fifteen days. Athos was very much impressed by this statement from a man who seemed to have a more extensive knowledge of Paris in its entirety than he had himself. After all, the residents in great cities know each only his own quarter, but this man's knowledge was universal. Athos recognised the fact that he had encountered a mind of exceptional intelligence, and rapidly decided to put his whole case in his hands and trust him implicitly.

He briefly recapitulated the events of the night of the dinner in the Café Rococo, and of Dunne's trial. He then came to the finding of the envelope in Dunne's old rooms.

'Sir Louis Ventnor! Well, I'm blown!' said Jim, relapsing into the vernacular. 'He was away for many years, got into a mess, and had to cut his lucky. However, he is all right now.' Then his active brain began with wonderful quickness to sum

up the case. 'You will find it very hard to prove anything against him, sir. You see, that envelope says nothing of importance. There's no harm in his hearing of his cousin's death. Fact is, it would cut exactly the other way, for if he had come into a very large property, why should he murder a man for jewellery? Did he get the news before the affair of the Tower, or afterwards? That's one point, and there are many others. In fact, this is a great case. I expect as we go on new difficulties will arise at every step. You cannot accuse him of anything at present. I really think, sir, it would be better for you to have nothing to say to him just now. Lie low. There is no reason why he should know that you take any interest whatever in his affairs. Everything about him now is plain and above-board. I have had my eye on him for some time, and I have discovered absolutely nothing.'

It was finally settled that Stemming should undertake the case and be allowed to expend, if necessary, certain sums in expenses, and have a fixed amount weekly while the inquiry was going on. This exactly suited Jim. Nothing pleased him better than to have a regular income coming in from a job, and he already began to make many and profound calculations about investments.

Jim threw himself heart and soul into the investigation of the Ventnor case. He hunted up two old servants of the family, and found out many details about Sir Louis's youth. He marked down all his

associates, studied all his habits, became intimate with one of his grooms, and made love to a pretty housemaid of his. Sir Louis did everything he ought to do, and did nothing unsuited to a man in his position. He was a capital shot, he was well known at Hurlingham, he lived among the people whom he ought to know, and he had no shady hangers-on. Everything about him was open. There seemed to be nothing to find out, chiefly because there was nothing concealed. Long and laboriously did Jim labour at the problem. At length an idea came; it was at present nebulous in the extreme. Brisure and Athos had made many efforts to trace the handwriting on the envelope, but failed. That it was English was of course evident, but they could get no closer to the identity of the writer. Jim got the pretty housemaid to collect envelopes, and give him every one that came to Sir Louis; but still he learned nothing.

Soon after Jim was put on the track of a young man who had stolen a jewel-case from a lady whose acquaintance he had made. Jim followed him to Paris and located the jewels. He then did a very neatly-planned bit of burgling, and wrote a full detail of all his doings to Jennie, telling her that he had got the diamonds safe in an inside pocket she had made for him, but he would stay on for a few days to go further into the Tower business. Then followed a fervid tale of his doings in this other affair. He had at last found out who wrote the envelope;

he had discovered all the Eiffel mystery—everything, and he thought those Frenchmen damned fools. All was clear to his own mind; only one little thing was wanted as legal evidence. On getting this letter, Jennie communicated with Sir Louis, and they met. She told him that she was going to leave her husband, and go to South America with a friend. To do this she wanted five hundred pounds, and she intended to start within forty-eight hours and never see England again. That evening she got the five hundred pounds.

Four days after this Jim walked the platform of the Gare du Nord, with the recovered diamonds in his pocket. The world smiled upon him. The Eiffel mystery was solved, and, which ever way the case went, he was a made man. He had said nothing on the matter to Athos; of his facts he was certain; what to do with them he had not yet made up his mind. He had dined well, and felt exhilarated. He walked into the buffet, where an old man stood at the counter drinking a steaming jorum of hot Jamaica rum. Now it was over a month since Jim had tasted that favourite and most dangerous beverage. The odour invaded his nostrils and acted on his brain. He would have some; no, he would not. He vacillated, finally he thought for a moment, put his hand in his pocket, and touched a railway key. He turned to the waiting train, and walked rapidly along until he found an empty compartment. He took out the key, locked the door, marked it outside

with a piece of chalk such as many old railway travellers carry, and walking briskly back to the buffet, asked for some Jamaica rum hot, of double strength. As this went down his throat he became a changed man. His face flushed, his eye brightened, and the fierce craving for more possessed him. Four more bumpers followed in rapid succession ; he was drinking against time. The bell began to ring. He held out his glass for the neat poison, and gulped down the liquid fire. He walked steadily towards his selected carriage, got in, locked the door with his railway key, and threw himself full length on the seat fast asleep.

The bell continued clanging as an old man came to the door, opened it with a railway key which he also possessed, and entered the carriage with Jim. The train started as he locked the door behind him and contemplated the sleeper. Jim had taken an immense quantity of spirits in a few minutes, and the result was a state which more resembled insensibility than sleep.

The old man produced a phial and a handkerchief. He placed this over Jim's face, and with a steady hand began pouring ether on to it. The heavy stertorous breathing of the drunkard became changed in its nature. After a few minutes he was reduced to a state of complete insensibility. The old man felt Jim's pockets, and pulled out his pocket-book. He rapidly turned out the contents, and found an envelope ; the jewels he found in a separate case in

an inner pocket. He replaced the handkerchief and poured on more ether, until pulsations almost ceased. He looked at Stemming in deep thought.

‘No, no,’ thought he, ‘I cannot risk your recovery. The cleverest detective in France or England cannot be insulted and allowed to survive. Everyone saw you were intoxicated, my friend—I took good care of that.’

Then he closed Jim’s nose and mouth for about eight minutes. He opened the door, Jim’s body was cast forth, and was dashed to the ground, head foremost. The old man opened all the windows.

‘Only a drunken Englishman fallen out,’ quoth he.

The train slackened. The old man opened the door on the convex side of a curve in the black, stormy night. He leapt to the ground, ran up a side-cutting, vaulted over a small wall, reached the gate of the station, got a ticket, and, a younger man by thirty years, jumped into a carriage far away from the one he had left, and sped on towards fair London town.

* * * * *

‘*Mon Dieu*, Athos!’ said Aramis next morning. ‘And this is our Stemming!’

‘I am afraid so,’ said Athos. ‘In fact, there can be no doubt of it. He was staying in a room at the Café Rococo. Let us go there and inquire.’

They did so, and whom should they meet but Brisure.

‘Monsieur Brisure,’ said Athos, ‘a sad accident this.’

‘No accident,’ said Brisure. ‘This is a murder, and it is the sequel of the *Affaire Eiffel*. I am justified in showing this to you, interested as you are in the matter. I warned you that you would make a mess of this business, and I said so because I was aware that you had omitted a most important element in your calculations. Ah! if I only had the business on over again! It runs in the same groove as the job on which I am now at work. This is the paper to which I allude.’

It had been torn into very small strips, and then torn across; but it was now gummed between pieces of thin, transparent, glazed calico, and could be read without difficulty. It was in English:

‘DEAR SIR,

‘Everything is clear. I have solved the Eiffel mystery. Meet me here this evening at 8 p.m., and I will explain all.’

‘That must have been meant for me,’ said Athos.

‘Undoubtedly,’ said Brisure. ‘Stemming wrote it, intending to tell you everything, probably immediately on his having completed the lost link in his chain of evidence. Thinking over the matter, he decided to keep his knowledge to himself, for a time, at all events.’

‘Monsieur Brisure,’ said Athos, ‘I acted very

foolishly at the last interview between us. My friend was then present, and he will now join me in begging of you to take over this case once more. I feel humiliated at thinking that I should have been so foolish as to think that anyone but you could ever have carried out the business in a proper manner.'

'Monsieur, I accept your apology. You already perceive how the poor cat tried to jump. He finished your business, was about to report to you, and then stopped to think if he might get more from the other side. Messieurs, the important element which you left out of your calculations was that Jim Stemming had a wife. When he entered the carriage at the Gare du Nord, he had diamonds worth ten thousand pounds on him. He telegraphed to Monsieur Hawke, his chief, that he had got the jewels. The carriage bore traces of ether, and the body had marks of ether poisoning. How did his murderer know that he had the jewels? His pocket-book is gone. That, of course, contained all the proofs of your affair. All our exertions are not yet over. There are many other things to be done; but you may rely on it that the investigation of the railway ether murder will lead to the elucidation of the Eiffel Mystery.'

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDSHIP.

‘AND you have never been in Dulwich Picture Gallery?’ said Caldwyn. ‘I assure you it is well worth seeing.’

‘Never,’ said Miss Browne, ‘and I am exceedingly anxious to go over it. I am told it did a good deal to mould the art-soul of Ruskin. I have often thought of going to look at it, but I believe it is too far for a cab. I know that it is in what you call a suburb of London, but then one never knows how far off a part of your city may be. Why, only to-day a gentleman told me he lived in a part of suburban London, and spent half an hour in a cab and three-quarters of an hour by rail in getting there.’

‘Dulwich is close by. Go to Victoria, take the London, Chatham and Dover train, and there you are in twenty minutes.’

‘Yes, but which London, Chatham and Dover train? And is it to be main-line or local, and which Victoria station, and at which place am I to get my ticket?—there are so many. I’ll tell you what, Mr. Caldwyn: I’ll pay you the compliment of treating you as if you were an American citizen. Take me out there to-morrow. Don’t you think that you and I might be very good friends? I have no hesitation in telling you that I would be most

happy in having you for a friend. I like listening to your views, which differ from mine just enough for companionableness. Suppose you look upon me as a pal? Call me Jack if you like. Let there be two people at least, in this big city, who can spend an hour together as rational beings, without any of this silly spooning. There are lots of things I should like to discuss with you, as one man would with another, and in this case I am really anxious to learn as much as I can about Dulwich. I know it is a rich mine of art, and, over and above that, it is so little known. How many of the London millions know of the gem they have got close by? Now, Mr. Caldwyn, you are a man of sense, and your friendship will do me good. I feel more of the reality, of the earnestness of life since I have known you. You have thought deeply. If you were a professor at Yale, I could sit and learn from you. Why should I not do so in a country walk?’

‘As the peripatetics did,’ said Caldwyn. ‘It is most remarkable, Miss Browne, how exactly your ideas are my own, save that they are ever so much better expressed. For some time I have been wishing to propose to you a bond of friendship. I would like dearly to have you for a friend. Intellectually, you are far superior to nearly all the fellows I know. You possess great originality, and you are a good logician, you are open to argument, your society does me good, and acts as a mental whet-

stone ; so much so, that argument with you always makes me see more clearly the correctness of my own views. You are frank yourself, and why should I not be frank with you ? It would be folly to ignore the fact that I was once in love with you ; but it is scarcely necessary to state that that silly sentiment did not survive a better acquaintance. You are not one to obtain love, chiefly because you do not care for it ; you have no feminine weaknesses. Your good looks are masculine, as are your talents and ideas ; yet I am very glad I passed through that stage of warm regard for you. It started me on a new life ; it dragged me out of that despicable career of a man-about-town.'

Miss Browne saw Dulwich Picture Gallery, Caldwyn acting as cicerone ; and their friendship was cemented.

Miss Browne's time was not all devoted to amusement. She did a great deal of good among the destitute toilers of London. One day she remembered that she had not been looking after any poor people for over a month, so she took the train to Notting Hill Gate, to see a Mrs. Jenkins, whose husband had had an accident, as Miss Browne had been informed by the secretary of the charitable society to which she belonged. She knocked on the door the prescribed signal, three single knocks, as Mrs. Jenkins lived on the third floor. The door was opened by the invalid husband, who had hobbled downstairs on the arrival at his place of another

visitor. Miss Browne ascended, knocked, was admitted, and saw—Mrs. Bellairs.

The ladies bowed. They had seen each other frequently at social functions, and had criticised each other's dresses, and each one had thought the other almost the handsomest woman in the assembly, but they had never been introduced. Each knew who the other was, and knew that the other knew, which made their meeting perhaps more constrained than if they had been strangers. Kitty looked about, and was just about to speak to the lady of the room, when, fortunately, just before she commenced, Mrs. Bellairs, who had been looking at her with a slightly comical gaze, said :

‘ I think we have often seen each other ; but, dear me ! who in the world would ever have thought of seeing you here ! I am Mrs. Bellairs.’

‘ I am Miss Browne,’ said Kitty ; ‘ but who in the world would ever have thought of seeing *you* here !’

The ice once broken, they spoke to each other as people who were not at all strangers, and then began to inquire into the affairs of Mrs. Jenkins. She was in a bad way. Mr. Jenkins had sprained his knee, and lost his work. Of course, all his clothes, except those he stood in, *i.e.*, his waistcoat, shirt, and trousers, had been pawned long before, including boots and hat. Mr. Jenkins had a character from one firm, with which he had worked fifteen years, only leaving on the collapse of the business. The place was scrupulously clean, but the woman's

face was drawn by hunger, and the three children huddled together in a corner, with wan, pinched faces, and dark marks under the eyes, looked like aged, haggard fairy changelings.

The two ladies quickly came to an agreement that this case should belong to both of them, and the expense be divided between them. They decided to pay the cost of a cab to convey the sick man to a hospital, and they promised to allow six shillings a week to the family until he was cured. This was salvation to them. How they managed to exist on six shillings a week is a mystery which this chronicler does not attempt to solve. It may be added that in two weeks the man returned, perfectly cured, and recommenced work on the following Monday; so these ladies prevented hideous misery, saved a family, gave the youngsters a new chance, restored the man to health, and earned the eternal gratitude of five people, for a sum of nine shillings and ninepence each.

The ladies walked together to Notting Hill Gate station, and, as they happened to be going in the same direction, they entered the same railway-carriage. Miss Browne, moved by a sudden inspiration, asked Mrs. Bellairs to lunch with her, an invitation which was at once accepted. It turned out that Mrs. Bellairs had been across the Pond, and had spent a fortnight in America, having taken a run over to see a friend of hers who had married an American, and gone with him to the States. She had crossed in

the *City of Berlin*—the same ship in which Miss Browne had come to England—and Captain Land, the most courteous of men, had acted as temporary guardian to them both, as he is *de jure* to all unprotected females. They had both become acquainted also with the doctor, the purser, and the first officer, and Mrs. Bellairs had met one or two people whom Miss Browne knew ; so they had lots to talk about, and before they separated had become very good friends indeed.

Miss Browne was greatly taken with Mrs. Bellairs. She was a strikingly beautiful woman, with blue-black hair, and eyes of that most rare of all colours, a perfect hazel. She dressed richly, and with fastidious taste. They were both tall, even for the girls of the present day, about the same height, slender, graceful, and well set up. Mrs. Bellairs was what one calls a very jolly girl. She laughed easily, and seemed to think laughter a very good thing. In fact, she seemed the sort of girl who would delight in any mad-cap fun, if secure among friends. And yet beneath all this there was a strength of character which only became evident on deeper investigation, combined with a goodness of heart which harmonized with a responsive chord in Miss Browne's own nature.

In any place smaller than London Kitty would probably long ago have known all about Mrs. Bellairs, as she was a conspicuous person and one likely to be discussed, but that little village, as it is called,

is so immense in its multitudes that one knows but little about one's next-door neighbour.

Miss Browne had only heard that Mrs. Bellairs was separated from her husband. 'Separated from her husband!' This was a curious arrangement. Divorce she quite comprehended, as indeed it is a matter of which most citizens of the United States have heard. As to what she thought of it, she had not quite made up her mind. In fact, the Reverend Jeremiah N. Smallpiece himself had not decided whether it was right or wrong from a Christian point of view, except of course in extreme cases, but when he had decided on his views she would know what to think. But she met every day wives separated from their husbands, husbands separated from their wives, and she pondered still more on that deepest of problems, Is a girl wise who, being already possessed of everything necessary to make life happy, deliberately surrenders her single blissfulness and binds her fate to that of another, of whose real character in the present she possesses but the very slightest knowledge, and as to whose future line of conduct she is in a state of profound ignorance?

A few days afterwards Mrs. Bellairs called, and before long they became very good friends. They moved in different sets, but their circles were osculating curves, and they encountered each other at almost every big crush. Miss Browne became deeply interested in the study of Mrs. Bellairs, her

character, her feelings, and her way of taking life and things in general.

She soon made up her mind that Mrs. Bellairs was about the happiest person she had ever known. She went everywhere, she did everything, she knew almost everybody, and she was one of those very rare beings, a man's woman and a woman's woman also. She had a dozen men friends, intimate friends, very intimate friends, and yet she inspired warm attachment among her lady acquaintances. She carried an atmosphere of high spirits with her wherever she went, and if anyone were melancholy, or in the blues, no better cure could be found than a few minutes in her society.

But although so intimate with so many men, and young, beautiful, gay, and in the mad maelstrom of society, and separated from her husband, no one whispered anything against her. Mrs. Bellairs took full advantage of the freedom accorded to her as a married woman. She was very fond of chaperoning girls almost as good-looking as herself, and she was most willing to give countenance and aid to any of those flirtations, so beautiful in their charming innocence and simplicity, which add such a piquancy to society.

She told Miss Browne that her whole career had been changed by her three weeks in the States, that she had there learned that a girl might be free from the claims of old fashioned conventionality without sacrificing her unsophisticated femininity,

that a man and woman can be friends, and friends only, and that friendships so formed are often the truest, the most constant, and the most sincere.

Miss Browne began to regard Mrs. Bellairs almost in the light of a fellow-citizeness, and there was an additional bond between them in their visits to the poor, which led to their working together in more cases than that of Mrs. Jenkins. In short, they soon became confidential friends. Mrs. Bellairs was as clever as she was pretty, and saw that Kitty was very much taken with Caldwyn, but that she had got so accustomed to rejecting suitors that she would possibly go on refusing until the end. Miss Browne did not reveal all her feelings to her friend, for she did not carry her heart on her balloon-sleeve for daws to peck at, but she felt that she could confide in her if she felt inclined to do so, and she liked to know that she had a confidante at hand when required.

One day they sat at tea when Mrs. Tacker called. The conversation turned on a law case of deep interest resulting from disagreements between a well-known millionaire and his wife. Thence they drifted on to the broad subject of matrimony. Mrs. Tacker spoke volubly and acrimoniously on the subject. She held forth on the subject of husbands, whom she generalized as being either tyrants or fools. She told tale after tale of the ill-doings of married men, and from what she said it would seem that all

men were civil, polite, good-natured, eager to please and easy to be pleased, upright, honourable, and all that was good, until they placed a ring on a woman's finger, when they became metamorphosed into an amalgam of Bluebeard, Marshal Richelieu, Othello and Quilp, and spent the greater part of their lives in torturing their wives or in debasing themselves by their vile habits. She did not hesitate to speak of her own experience. She gave a vivid picture of her own trials. Her narration was glib, for, with her, this was an oft-told tale, though indeed in justice it must be said that she had never before told it to a friend of her own sex.

Mrs. Tacker bade adieu, and then Mrs. Bellairs gave her ideas on the same subject. She told Miss Browne that no one could have any idea of what felicity was until she, or he, had been happily married. She said people were not meant to live alone, that such a thing was opposed to every instinct of human nature. She quoted scores of people they both knew who were happy in their marriages, naming as an after-thought Mrs. Jenkins—who certainly seemed perfectly contented with her lot, as long as her good man could work for her. She added, that if married people were not happy, it must be the fault of one or both, and that it was generally the fault of the woman. 'Now, look at Mrs. Tacker,' said she: 'before her aunt left her money, she lived for years in Paris; and her husband toiled in the blazing sun of Jellalabad to

send her home enough to enjoy herself.' She wound up by saying she hated Mrs. Tacker, and had always instinctively done so, from the first moment she saw her.

It is an old rule, that if one feels an intense dislike towards anyone, it is almost a certainty that the feeling will be reciprocated. We may be quite certain that Dr. Fell felt a vivid antipathy towards the person who did not like him.

On the very evening of the last-mentioned conversation Miss Browne was at a dance, and sitting in an alcove, strange to say, alone. The recess had been divided into two parts by a curtain, and she had fallen into a dreamy state of mind—an occurrence which of late had not been infrequent—when she was roused from her reverie by voices on the other side of the screen. Mrs. Tacker was eating an ice, brought to her by a certain Major Clinton, an old friend of hers—a gray-haired, nice, gentlemanly, cynical old officer, one of those men of the world with whom Mrs. Tacker very much liked to have an occasional talk, as with them she could listen to anything, or say anything. What fully awakened Miss Browne was the mention of her friend's name.

'So Bellairs is in Norway, is he?' said Mrs. Tacker. 'Takes himself off, I suppose, so as to give her rope enough to hang herself. Well he won't have much trouble in getting up his case. I suppose she means to be divorced and most likely to marry

someone else, though which it is to be it's hard to make out. She can't marry the lot. She's not in Travancore. She will have to clear out of England and go to Naples, however; for I don't think we have quite come to standing quite that sort of revelations yet. Our dance, Captain Danby? Yes, quite right. I do so want you to give me the straight tip for the handicap. I am making a book.'

Major Clackton, a duplicate of Major Clinton, came up and sat down beside his friend.

'Madame Tacker is still full of running,' said Clinton. 'What a tongue she has got! She has just been doing all she could to ruin Mrs. Bellairs' character.'

'Well,' said Clackton, who had only just come home after twenty years in the Deccan, 'I am surprised at Mrs. Tacker, of all people in the world, talking like that. People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.'

'Dear boy,' said Clinton, 'it is exactly those who live in glass houses who always do throw stones. Defiance, not defence, is their motto, and they believe that the strategy of attack is their best plan of safety. To change the simile, they defile the water all round as much as they can, to distract attention from their own combinations. However, it doesn't matter in the least what Madam Tacker says—Mrs. Bellairs is all right; she is one of those who run on the square.'

‘Or else she is about as deep as they make ’em,’ said Clackton.

The two old clubmen went off to patrol the rooms and criticise and scandalize.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONSTANCY.

ABOUT this time Miss Browne went to Birkenhead to visit a family of globe-trotters whom she had met in Fifth Avenue. Caldwyn was left desolate. And let us at once acknowledge that our hero—for he seems to be the only one in these pages who can make any fair pretence to the position—our hero was a consummate hypocrite. His proposal of simple and unselfish friendship was a fraud. He earnestly desired to make Miss Browne care for him. His impromptu verses on the back of her programme had been equivalent to a proposal, and Miss Browne had most unequivocally shown that she would have none of his adoration. His manner, even more than his rhymes, had shown that within half a minute he would have popped the momentous question, and she had stopped him in time to prevent his making a fool of himself. He was mortified at the time; but he possessed a logical mind, and, thinking the matter over, he saw that at the instant when he almost proposed, Miss

Browne knew absolutely nothing about him, except that he was six feet two, moderately well dressed, and had the manners of a gentleman. She knew nothing about what he really was. Since then the proposal of a friendship, hinted at by her, was eagerly grasped by him, and she, claiming American prerogatives, had gone on many a voyage of discovery under his escort. This gave them ample opportunities of getting to know each other thoroughly, and, in fact, this is one of the chief advantages of the American system of dispensing with chaperons. It often happens that a man is cowed by the presence of a chaperon, while in those cases where the guardian dragon is herself a frisky matron, she may attract to herself those attentions due to the spinster, or she may cause young Benedict to say to himself: 'I say! if this be matrimony—if this is the way a wife of mine would go on—I had better think twice before crossing the Rubicon.'

They set about a task perhaps never attempted before, and that is, a complete study of London. This subject had one great advantage in Caldwell's eyes: it would never end. New York can be known in a week. All worth seeing in it lies within twenty minutes' drive of Stuart's Marble Palace. The sights of Liverpool, of Birmingham, can be seen in a day. In most cities the gems of a place are collected in one small quarter, but London is an immense agglomeration of huge cities, each one of which, in itself, takes a long time to know.

As friends, they got on capitally together; they were both clever and educated to an extent far beyond that reached by the ordinary members of good society; they agreed on many points, but they differed quite often enough to have the enlivenment of an occasional downright good argument. The time passed very pleasantly, but before long Caldwyn began to have an uncomfortable idea that he was getting no 'forrarder.' He began to have a feeling of intense impatience after each of these exploring trips. Kitty was as open, as friendly, and as confidential with him as if they were 'pardners' in a mine or cowboy pals. She was too friendly, in fact. But, if ever he showed even the faintest intention of talking nonsense, as she called all that nice spoony talk so usual between young people, at the faintest sign of amateness she froze him, not with a word, not with a look, but just with a *je ne sais quoi* in the tone of her voice which threw him back on himself, and, in spite of his most strenuous endeavours, made him seem cold and almost sulky, as long as they continued to be together. If she had been a finished coquette, and had wished to make his heart-strings into an Eolian harp, for the wild winds of passion to play upon, she could not have proceeded upon a better plan than that which she half unconsciously adopted.

Like every man who is really in love, Caldwyn did not judge things wisely, and indeed acted in many ways as if he were rather a donkey. He

began to think that Miss Browne would have liked him better if he had been rather a scamp. He remembered that 'Every woman is at heart a rake.' A really good man may be liked by a girl, but always with a little leaven of contempt, unless he be a curate. He felt that Miss Browne would have liked him better if he had still a little of his former devilment in his character, and wild ideas of getting into a row at the Empire, or bolting with Mrs. Tacker, passed through his heated brain. He thought how exquisite it would be to rush back and be forgiven. But such ideas were merely the aberrations of a moment. The fact is, he had fallen in love with Miss Browne before he had spoken to her, in a stupid blundering masculine sort of way, and to him the idea of any other woman was repugnant. He had had a past, but that was dead and buried, and at present he lived for Miss Browne, and for her only.

And what were her views? It would be difficult to say. She intended ultimately to get married; she thought it would be nicer than living alone. And she began to like Caldwyn. She never asked herself if she were beginning to love him, but her feelings were something in the same state as a solution on the point of precipitation. A shock might lead to a rapid crystallization, and that crystal might be a jewel from the treasure of the great god Amor, who carries many arrows in his quiver, but whose most fatal shaft may be labelled Propinquity.

Now, Miss Browne had gone to Birkenhead, and Caldwyn was left with a dreadful feeling of blank loneliness ; and he found himself one evening propping up a doorway, as utterly separated from the surrounding social tumult as if he were in Griqualand-West. He heard his name mentioned, and glancing down, he saw seated close by him no less a person than Mrs. Tacker, without any attendant cavalier.

‘ Mr. Caldwyn,’ said she, ‘ would you do me the favour of taking me to the buffet ? I am worn out, and I am really in want of a cup of tea.’

Caldwyn offered her his arm, and led her to a recess near the table.

‘ Would you not prefer some champagne ?’ said Caldwyn, and then, as he began to feel himself becoming awake, he said : ‘ Or, if you really are done up, take a brandy-and-soda. Don’t regard me. I’m used to that sort of thing.’

‘ Well, I don’t mind ; but, Mr. Caldwyn, you must bring it to me in a champagne glass.’

He sat down beside her, and never had Caldwyn been more astonished in his life. The Mrs. Tacker whom he had always looked upon as the most flighty and frivolous of women turned out to be one of the most sensible he had ever met. She was more absolutely free from a trace of coquetry than almost any woman he had ever known. The conversation was a little desultory, until, he scarcely knew how, he touched upon something which had

some connection with his invention. It was a matter in which his opinion differed materially from that of older mechanicians. His manner changed, his eyes sparkled, he was rapidly carried away by his subject, and before he knew where he was, he had mentioned the words 'thermodynamic functions,' and then pulled himself up with a keen feeling that he had made himself ridiculous.

'Thermodynamic functions,' said Mrs. Tacker, who had a quick ear. 'I know all about that; I was brought up on it. My father was mad about those kind of things, and we children got very tired of them. I am awfully sorry for it now. You know, children always get a distaste for a father's hobby, but I would give anything to recommence my studies at the exact point at which they were broken off. I had general ideas, you know, and I am afraid I have forgotten a good deal, but I should soon pick it up again. Now, what would you say is the most important matter in which these affairs come in?'

'Steam-engines,' said Caldwyn.

'Oh, of course, I know that,' said she with unblushing effrontery. 'I mean in other ways. My grand-uncle was the first man who made steam-engines and trains and signals.'

'Was Stephenson your uncle, or was it Treve-thick?'

'Mr. Trevethick was my grand-uncle,' said she, making a mental note of the name.

Caldwyn had a fault, and a very serious one. On

anything connected with his invention he was a bore of unequalled tiresomeness. He knew his failing, and generally succeeded in keeping off the dangerous subject, but once started, there was no holding him. On he went, while Mrs. Tacker stood up, took his arm, and soon had him started in a waltz, she noting as she went off where her engaged partner stood, so as to be able to come and scold him for not coming to claim her. Afterwards she went off to the furthest room with Caldwyn, and with trained skill threw in an occasional word of acquiescence, surprise, or dissent, while her face beamed with intelligent appreciation of a discourse of which she understood no more than if it had been spoken in the language of the Khirgiz or the Andamanese.

‘Madame Tacker getting up another case,’ said Major Clinton to Major Clackton.

‘Ay,’ said Clackton, with that indescribable, long-drawn, many-meaning, Scotch aye-e-e, ‘she likes them that age.’ And before next day was over the new case was discussed in many a smoking-room.

The real fact of the matter was that Caldwyn endured a dreary sense of loneliness during Miss Browne’s absence. He felt that he could not speak to any young and pretty girls while she was away, as if doing so would betoken inconstancy; but he had no sentiments of that nature regarding Mrs. Tacker. Sir Louis Ventnor was away, and Mrs. Tacker began to greatly admire Caldwyn. He much

resembled the statue of the warrior of Agasais, which some consider a finer type of manly beauty than the Apollo Belvedere. She wished to conquer him. She tried her fascinations. He began to be seen with her frequently. One day she wrote to him to meet her at Lady Mallanby's garden-party.

Caldwyn had had an idle afternoon, and with something of the aimless manner which of late often possessed him, he found himself about half-past four at Lady Mallanby's, whose house was in an open space of a couple of acres, one of those rare clearings in the masonry forest of London.

A long string of carriages was at the gate as Caldwyn's hansom drove up. He dismounted outside and walked through the partially-gilded gates into the grounds, which, though small, were beautifully laid out, and contained some magnificent elm-trees. In the house there was the usual crush. He made his way through the throng with an ease the result of long practice, shaking hands with, and recognising several scores of people, more than half of whose names he did not know. He heard his own name called, and looking round, he saw Mrs. Bellairs.

'How do you do, Mr. Caldwyn?' said she. 'What a stranger you have become to all of us! I had a long letter this morning from a friend of yours, Miss Browne. Such an *interesting* letter. You would never imagine what is happening in Birkenhead. I should like to tell you ever so much about it, if it were not for this dreadful crush.'

All the misty clouds in which Caldwyn had been mooning vanished.

‘It must be better outside,’ said he, offering his arm and piloting her through a glass door on to the lawn, round which they began walking to the strains of the Blue Hungarian Band.

‘How long has Miss Browne been gone?’ asked Mrs. Bellairs.

‘Fourteen days,’ said Caldwyn.

He would have liked to say ‘One million two hundred and nine thousand six hundred seconds, each one of which seems a year.’

‘And the very day after she left you became the sworn admirer and slave of Mrs. Tacker!’

‘I!’ said he, almost stopping and facing Mrs. Bellairs. ‘What in the world put such a thing into your head?’

‘What put such a thing into my head? Why, everyone is talking of it. It’s discussed at every tea-table, and Mr. Simkin tells me there are bets about it in the clubs. It’s not mere London news: it’s known from Colchester to Birkenhead.’

‘Mrs. Bellairs, I’m astonished; I am struck dumb; I am speechless with surprise; I am knocked into a cocked hat; bowled over; euchred; smashed into atoms, you know, to hear such ridiculous nonsense.’

‘Sit down, Mr. Caldwyn,’ said she, as they passed a pretty little Moorish kiosk. ‘You know I am an old married woman, and I may step in where

younger angels might fear to tread. I must tell you that I regard Kitty Browne as my dearest friend. She is an admirable girl, and as honest and true and loyal as anyone that breathes. Now, Mr. Caldwyn, as you and she were great friends, I may tell you that I am most anxious that she should be happily married. There are very few girls in the world who possess the capability of bestowing so much happiness on a husband as she does, and it is a shame that so much latent power should be going to waste. And I *did* think you admired her very much.'

'Oh, Mrs. Bellairs, you know her well. Have I any chance?'

'She has never shown the slightest indication which would enable me to give you an answer, and I would tell you all I know, Mr. Caldwyn, if I thought you were true. But are you? If you are a person who takes advantage of her absence to start a hot flirtation with a married lady whose husband is in Jellalabad, then you are no fitting suitor for Kitty Browne.'

'Mrs. Bellairs, I give you my word of honour that I never heard such a pretty woman talk such sublime nonsense as the last few words you have uttered. I beg you won't think me rude. Every word I say is true.'

'Every word, Mr. Caldwyn? Why, since Kitty left you have been tied to Mrs. Tacker's chatelaine.'

'I have seen her a few times, but as a mere acquaintance.'

‘A mere acquaintance of the greatest coquette in London, a sort of person who, *faute de mieux*, would flirt with a lamp-post.’

‘It would be folly for me to pretend that I do not understand what you mean, but I can assure you that there has never been the shadow of a flirtation between Mrs. Tacker and myself.’

‘But mere acquaintance does not ripen so rapidly. Kitty went away on a Tuesday, and on Wednesday, at the Telfords’ dance, you never left Mrs. Tacker the whole evening. You made yourselves quite conspicuous. I heard dozens of people speaking of you. Mere friendships are not so sudden.’

‘I remember that evening, now you mention it. You know, Mrs. Bellairs, that I am desperately in love with Miss Browne; I don’t mind telling you as her friend. I felt dreadfully cut up when she left, and by pure accident I met Mrs. Tacker, and after we had been talking for awhile, it turned out that she knows all about a science I am very much interested in.’

‘A subject of mutual interest—a bond between you,’ said she, beginning to smile. ‘I hope, Mr. Caldwyn, it will be no breach of confidence if you tell me what the subject is.’

‘Thermodynamic functions,’ said he, getting very red, and beginning to obtain a glimmering idea that he had made himself seem very foolish.

‘Thermo, thermo, thermo what?’ said Mrs. Bellairs, with a roguish glitter in her eye. ‘Mrs.

Tacker fond of thermo-what's-his-names! Oh! Mr. Caldwyn, say that again. Has it anything to do with logarithms? Kitty once tried to teach me logarithms. Oh my! this is killing.'

'Yes,' said Caldwyn very sheepishly; 'it's all logarithms.'

'Oh, Claudine Tacker! Claudine Tacker!' said she. '*You* fond of logarithms.' She could hardly refrain from shrieking with laughter. 'So,' said she, 'this last fortnight, while everyone regarded you as quite gone on your well-preserved friend, you have really been talking about logarithms all the time?'

'There or thereabouts,' said Caldwyn; 'but, Mrs. Bellairs, how about this letter from Miss Browne? You are keeping me on pins and needles.'

'Am I yet certain that you are worthy to be told?'

'Mrs. Bellairs, I judge people not by their faces so much as by their voices. The tone of yours tells me that you do not really doubt me. If you listen to mine you will perceive that it rings with the firm accents of truth.'

'Well, I can tell you one thing, Kitty has not yet heard of this scandal about you and Mrs. Tacker. Not that she would mention it to me even if she had, but the drift of the letter tells me that she has heard nothing which would cause her serious uneasiness, which I am certain this gossip would. Now, Mr. Caldwyn, I think I have been very good to you in telling you what I have just said. See that you act accordingly.'

‘I am exceedingly grateful,’ said he.

‘I certainly think that when you knew of all this gossip you should have been seen less in Mrs. Tacker’s society.’

‘I never dreamed of such gossip.’

‘Do you mean to say you did not hear of bets in the clubs?’

‘Not a word.’

‘Well, Major Clinton told me that he knows Mr. Tacker very well, and was in the same Station with him years ago. Mr. Tacker has lately been very ill—jungle fever, I think it is called—and he nearly died of this several times before. He ought to have come home long ago; but he won’t, as I believe he is completing some great thing or other—I don’t know exactly what. Something is to be built on bahadoors, and a lot of ferocious dhoolies, I believe, are to be subdued. I am not quite sure. But it’s his life’s work, and he means to finish it. Major Clinton says that whenever a man talks about a life’s work, and gets ill in India, he always dies; and it is already settled who is to take the poor man’s place. You are to marry Mrs. Tacker.’

‘Carrots and carronades!’ said Caldwyn, *sotto voce*.

‘Well, you might have to. Besides, the slightest rumour of your attentions to her would lose you Kitty for ever. If she heard of such a thing, all would be over. It is quite natural that people should think you were carrying on with Mrs. Tacker. To

be frank with you, Mr. Caldwyn, your mere acquaintance has had all the appearance of the most open and barefaced flirtation I have ever witnessed.'

'Mrs. Bellairs, a veil has fallen from before my eyes. I have been blind—stupid. The fact is, I have been so much in love with Miss Browne that I have completely lost even the moderate amount of acumen which I once possessed.'

'Mr. Caldwyn, I am inclined to believe you. But if I see you continue to be attentive to Mrs. Tacker——'

'I shall never speak a word to her again which can possibly be avoided,' said Caldwyn.

'Well, I think we've been sitting secluded quite long enough,' said Mrs. Bellairs; 'suppose we join the march round, and I will tell you a little, but only a little, of Kitty's letter.'

They joined the circling throng, and Caldwyn soon after left, not knowing that during the previous quarter of an hour Mrs. Tacker had been gazing at him and Mrs. Bellairs, with rage in her eyes, and a frenzied craving for vengeance in her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

INNUENDO.

MISS BROWNE, who had returned, had just finished a late lunch, when an early visitor knocked at the door, and Mrs. Tacker was announced. She was

effusively friendly, and evidently came for a comfortable chat. Verdi was about to bring out a new opera in Paris, and the muster of the royalty of Europe was to be something unprecedented. A ball was to be given by a *legitimiste* Duchesse, which was to be *très chic*, and Mrs. Tacker was among the invited. She had called to know if Miss Browne would like to be present also. If so, she would get her an invitation.

Kitty declined, as she was engaged for weeks in advance; and, indeed, if such had not been the case, she would not have very much wished to accompany Mrs. Tacker in her trip, as she did not particularly care for that lady, and, as a rule, did not see more of her than was necessitated by ordinary politeness. In fact, she was rather surprised at her visitor proposing the companionship, considering the terms on which they stood towards each other. But Mrs. Tacker seemed for the moment to have assumed quite a new character. She was friendly, affectionate, garrulous, quite childlike and bland in her delight at the prospect of running back to Paris for a few days. Then she began to press her invitation most earnestly, and at last, in a moment of confidential girlish impulsiveness, she let the cat out of the bag.

It appeared that a certain Marquis de Ravalin de Faux Bras was to be at the ball, and that his sister, the Duchesse de Ponteau, was very anxious to get him well married, as it was time for him to regulate him-

self, marry a fortune, pay off his gambling debts, and settle on his family estates. Miss Browne felt that Mrs. Tacker paid her the compliment of treating her as a woman of the world, prepared to treat business as business, and as one who was quite devoid of any girlish foolishness about marrying for love, or any nonsense of that kind.

‘He is a very handsome man, my dear ; rather bald, certainly, but that means nothing in these days, and he can be most fascinating. I am sure you would like him. Of course, you need not accept him unless you wish, but just think of the title. And they are the old lot, too, as ancient as the Capets ; none of your mushroom Bonapartist dukes.’

Miss Browne was astounded at the coolness of the woman in speaking to her in such a way. She was about to reply by a chilling refusal, when Mrs. Tacker, who was a shrewd observer, anticipated her and said :

‘I am so sorry. I see I have offended you, and, on consideration, I perceive, of course, that I should never have spoken as I have done. I ought to have recognised that you have nothing in common with the worldly, hard-hearted, openly mercenary nature of many of the marriages of the present day. I have lived so long in Paris that I have become callous, and I am afraid that my better feelings have become blunted ; but I should have remembered that you are a person very different from those of whom I have been speaking. And yet, Miss Browne, is it good, is

it wise, for us to quite shut our eyes to the extravagance, the meanness, the unreliability, and the worse faults of the men of the day? I know them, my dear, and I hope you may never gain a knowledge equally accurate in a manner so painful as I have done. There is that young scamp, Mr. Simkin, lost two thousand pounds at baccarat last week. Mr. Caldwyn lost four hundred at the same time. He, poor fellow, can't afford it. His protested bills are flying all about, and his creditors threatened to sell him up; but he started a report that he is going to marry a girl with a large fortune, so they have given him three months' grace. I wonder who she can be. However, I am glad he has sense enough to save himself in such a manner. If he is wise, he will never tell her about his difficulties until he has made sure of the money. Have you quite made up your mind you won't come to Paris? I am sure you forgive me for my indiscretion about the Marquis. Good-bye, dear;' and Mrs. Tacker was gone.

CHAPTER XIX.

EARL'S COURT.

IT was a beautiful night, and the Earl's Court Exhibition seemed like fairy-land with its rainbow-hued fountains, and its thousands of Chinese lanterns, while Dan Godfrey's band played as it only can do.

Miss Browne stopped to look at a facsimile of a fresco on the Deria Doulet palace at Seringapatam, representing the surprise of an English division by Tippoo Sahib. The English commander was represented as sitting in a palankeen, looking very grave, with his finger in his mouth. A tumbrel was blowing up, and a bheestie water-carrier was advancing with some water in a bucket to arrest the explosion. The English, in square, were represented as fighting bravely, and dying manfully, surrounded by thousands of Tippoo's troops.

When Miss Browne turned, she had lost her party, which was headed by Mrs. Bellairs. She proceeded to search for them, and at last came upon Mrs. Bellairs, whom she found alone, she having been just left by some gentleman whom, in the hurry, Miss Browne did not recognise. In fact, she only saw the back of his head, and noticed that he had gray hair.

Mrs. Bellairs then proposed that they should go out by the West Kensington entrance (which was now nearer than that by which they had come into the structure), and train home. Miss Browne agreed, and they proceeded in the desired direction, when, as they were beginning to ascend the hill, Mrs. Bellairs said :

‘Stop for one minute, and have a look at the scene. You know, Kitty, how prosaic and sad-minded we English are supposed to be, and yet I think the palaces of Aladdin had not a prettier scene than that before us. Let us sit down and admire.’

From a side-walk right up to them walked two gentlemen. One was Major Clinton, and the other was—Mr. Caldwyn.

‘Miss Browne was brave, but to her heart
The life-blood thrilled with sudden start.’

She was taken aback. Mrs. Tacker’s story had rankled, and had never been out of her mind since she had heard it. It had gnawed all the evening. The stoicism of the Spartan boy was as nothing to the capacity for endurance developed by a habitude of good society.

It was revolting to listen to the apparently honest manliness of his voice, the friendly warmth of his greeting, and to see the lofty strength of his bearing. He looked a knight of might, and truth, and courtesy, and she now knew him to be a monster of meanness. And she might have loved that creature. Only at the moment it flashed upon her that she might have loved him, and at the thought a loathing of this man grew upon her.

‘Won’t you have a little refreshment?’

It was Major Clinton who spoke. He had asked her twice.

Miss Browne hurriedly declined, when Mrs. Bellairs said briskly:

‘If you won’t, my dear, I shall. Stay here. I’ll be back in a moment. Now, Major, a cup of tea, and many thanks.’

Mrs. Bellairs was gone. Caldwyn sat down beside

Miss Browne. No shyness about him, no sign that he was a dishonoured man. Now, be it known that Miss Browne had a fine fiery temper in reserve, as everyone has who is worth a groat; and her feeling of misery was rapidly changing into one of indignant wrath. To think that this vile being should have trafficked with her name to cajole bum-bailiffs! He sat down beside her; he stretched one foot straight out, and slightly bent the other. He turned towards her. His eyes gazed rapturously at her beauty, lit by the arc light. His voice sounded low, deep, sweet, but powerful.

‘Miss Browne, you know me better now. Once more I tell you that I love you.’

‘Yes, I know you better now.’

She stopped. She felt almost choked with the rush of words which came crowding to her lips. He sat there gazing at her—he, whose every look was an insult. Oh, the impudence of the scoundrel!

‘Yes, Miss Browne, you know me better now. I cannot say I hope, but I have dared to hope that I may hope at some future time. I can live no longer without telling you what I feel.’

‘Sir,’ said she, ‘your audacity, your presumption, are almost incredible.’

‘Miss Browne,’ said he, springing to his feet, ‘what does this mean? Am I dreaming? Am I in my right senses? Surely you are at least my friend?’

‘Mr. Caldwyn, it would be much better for you to

pay your creditors by honest work. You have the cheek of Mephistopheles. Be good enough to leave me.'

He stood up as if petrified.

'You are too clever,' said he faintly, 'to do this without deep thought and premeditation. God help me!'

He raised his hand in a faltering way to his forehead, and, as if half blinded, he tottered away, the wreck of a once strong man.

'Jowabed!'^{*} quoth a small gentleman who had seen for a moment, but had heard nothing.

Miss Browne sat trembling on the seat; but she heard new footsteps, and, being a woman, she did what no man could have done—forced back her feelings, and began to look not very particularly ghastly.

'Oh, Miss Bwowne, bai Jove, you know,' said Simkin, 'what a lovely night!'

'Yes,' said Miss Browne.

'And I think it's so nice of these fellows having so many gween lights on, at the fountains. That's my colour, gween.'

'Yes,' said Miss Browne.

'All this makes one sentimental. Don't you think so?'

'Yes,' said Miss Browne.

'Ah, so good of you! A little encouragement. Not that I need it—I am very daring.'

^{*} Rejected.

‘Yes,’ said Miss Browne.

‘Oh, Miss Bwowne, bai Jove, you know,’ said he, ‘none but the bwave deserve the fair. I have long loved you—I have, weally. Miss Bwowne, may I call you K——’

‘Oh, get away, you nasty little wretch!’ muttered she, but so low that he could not hear.

She jumped up and dashed by him so suddenly as to almost upset him. His eyeglass dropped.

His first instinct was to get his glass, but, as he stooped half-way down, he paused and looked after Miss Browne.

‘I’ve fwightened her,’ said he; ‘I weally fwightened her.’

Mrs. Bellairs spent an unusual time over that cup of tea. When she came back there was no one there.

‘Do you think our plan has succeeded, Major?’

‘Well, we’ve done our part, and we can do no more.’

They went out to West Kensington, and ascertained that a short time previously Miss Browne had hailed a cab herself, and gone away. The Major called one for Mrs. Bellairs, and took the Underground for the St. James’s region, thinking sagely that Mrs. Bellairs’ little plan had failed this journey.

CHAPTER XX.

DON JUAN.

NEXT day Mrs. Bellairs called on Miss Browne, and found some friends with her. She stayed on until the others had left.

‘Kitty,’ said Mrs. Bellairs when they were alone, ‘I am so sorry you did not confide in me. I was altogether in the dark; and, oh dear! oh dear! I am afraid I have made an awful mess of everything. Serve me right for meddling; but, my dear Kitty, you really might have told me all about it.’

‘Told you, confided in you about what? There is nothing to confide.’

‘Your engagement, Kitty—your engagement.’

‘My engagement!’ said she with a burning blush. ‘Nothing is more improbable.’

‘Oh, but I don’t mean a mere flirting engagement for fun, such as you have been trying for, Kitty; though what is fun to you is death for him, poor fellow! I mean your real engagement.’

‘My real engagement! what *do* you mean?’

‘Your engagement to be married.’

‘I am not engaged to be married.’

‘I don’t mean a flame, *pour passer le temps*—I mean your old settled engagement, made originally by your father, and finally settled in Paris.’

‘My dear Julia, you are talking of what I know nothing about.’

‘Then, you are not now engaged to be married?’

‘I am certainly not engaged to be married.’

‘Have you ever been engaged?’

‘Never!’

‘Do you mean to tell me that your father and old Mr. Blogg were not partners in pork, and you and young Mr. Blogg were not engaged as children?’

‘Really, Julia, this is too bad. You terrible girl, you would make a joke of anything.’

‘But I assure you, my dear, I am not joking. I am really in earnest, and I begin to think this is a very serious matter.’

‘I never heard the name of Blogg in my life.’

‘Then, my dear child, it’s a lucky thing I heard of this, and had the courage to speak to you about it. You must know that the only person I really flirt with is Major Clinton. Such a nice old man! He tells me secrets, known to nobody else. Well, he has just been calling, and told me that he had heard, in *strict confidence* from Mrs. Tacker, a long story about your having been engaged for years to a Mr. Blogg. She told him Mr. Blogg came to Paris last year to see you, and get the engagement *visé*, and that next fall you are to go to America and become Mrs. Blogg. He told it to me as a great secret. I was not to tell any ladies; but all the clubmen know it, as Mrs. Tacker told two or three of them.’

‘What a horrid thing to say!’ said Miss Browne, deeply indignant. ‘How could she have invented such a story?’

‘She is a dreadful creature, and it is such an unkind thing to say! Kitty, I love you dearly, but when I heard the story I hated you at first. It seemed so cruel to Mr. Caldwyn, if you had been engaged all this time, for he loves you truly and sincerely, and he is such a dear good fellow! Last night I *did* so hope you would make it all right. But, Kitty dear, this Mrs. Tacker is an odious creature. I always hated her, and now I despise her. It is perfectly clear that she is a story-teller, and a most dangerous one, as she possesses such a wonderful imagination. In fact, it is not safe to believe one single word she says on any single subject.’

‘But do you really think, Ju, she would be capable of inventing a story altogether untrue, and of telling a deliberate falsehood?’

‘Capable! Why, my dear child, what more do you want? Hasn’t she done it in this case?’

Miss Browne seemed to be deeply agitated. She stood up, went to the window and looked out, pressed her forehead for a moment against a window-pane, and returned to her seat. She looked as if about to faint.

‘Kitty, there is something the matter; confide in me, and let me help you. You quite got over that mean story about Mr. Blogg, and now you are upset

again. It must be something about this wretched woman. Kitty, when did you see Mrs. Tacker last?’

‘She called here yesterday.’

‘And she told you something dreadful—I am sure she did. You may be certain it was not true. Kitty, Kitty, she told you something dreadful about Mr. Caldwyn, and you believed it. Why did you? You might have guessed it was false.’

Miss Browne could not restrain her tears, and before long Mrs. Bellairs had heard a full account of what Mrs. Tacker had told regarding Caldwyn.

‘So,’ said Mrs. Bellairs, ‘Mrs. Tacker says that Mr. Simkin told her that Mr. Caldwyn is pressed for money, and puts off his creditors by saying that he is going to marry a heiress. That’s you, my dear. It seems to me that this story betrays the trail of the serpent, and the name of that snake is Tacker. Now, you look upon me as a mere butterfly. Never did you make a greater mistake. I have immense latent business faculties. You just wait and see if I haven’t. I’ll ask Mr. Simkin all about this, and then we shall see what we shall see. I will write and invite him to come and see me to-morrow;’ saying which, she walked to a davenport, and proceeded to pen a note. ‘Nothing like promptness in business matters. You have never seen me serious before, have you?’

She wrote rapidly. When almost finished she paused, and began to think intently. Then a smile began to dimple her cheeks. She quickly tore up

the note and began another. When near the end she again paused, and her eyes began to sparkle with amusement at some memories of the past.

‘Kitty,’ said she, ‘do you know Mr. Simkin very well?’

‘Not very,’ said Miss Browne; ‘in fact, I don’t care much about him.’

‘I thought he was going to propose to you last night. Ah, Kitty,’ said she, jumping up, ‘he *did* propose to you. I know he did; I only said so without thinking, but now I am sure. Oh, Kitty, if I could only blush as delightfully as you do!’

Miss Browne acknowledged that Mr. Simkin had popped the momentous question. Mrs. Bellairs insisted on knowing exactly how it was done. Kitty, who was a practised amateur actress, gradually began to see the comic side of the affair, and gave a very good representation of the little man’s language. Mrs. Bellairs laughed until she nearly cried.

‘Oh, but you don’t know half enough about him,’ said Mrs. Bellairs. ‘He poses as a lady-killer. He absolutely told Major Clinton that he never could get on with married men. He has regular toadies at the clubs. He lends them fivers and stands them dinners, and they listen to stories of his conquests. Oh, he’s not particular in what he says. He would have been kicked long ago, but the men don’t like to beat such a mite—and, besides, they only laugh at him. Now, he is not too little for us to notice.

Let us just teach him a lesson. You will help me, won't you? Now for the first move.'

She again sat down and wrote :

'MY DEAR MR. SIMKIN,

'I want to see you *very particularly*. Call to-morrow about one o'clock. I shall be at home to *no one* else, and you can *stay* to lunch if you like.

'Yours very sincerely,

'JULIA BELLAIRS.'

'Isn't that rather—rather a little bit too civil, don't you think?'

'It's meant to be so, my dear. He will show this letter to his cronies. Oh yes, indeed, he shows letters. Major Clinton told me so; and oh, Kitty, it has only just occurred to me, the Major must have meant what he said as a warning to me. Now I see it all. He could have told me something more than he did. There is something behind. The little creature has tried to make love to me, *to me*, my dear. I thought nothing of it at the time. But I'll settle him now, see if I don't.'

Next day, precisely at one o'clock, Mr. Simkin knocked at Mrs. Bellairs' door, sporting a new hat and cane and new gloves. He was shown into the drawing-room, an apartment which could be made into a good-sized ball-room by throwing open folding doors opening into a sitting-room.

He studied the large mirror very carefully, and with a good deal of satisfaction. The points of his

moustache could have passed through the eye of a needle, and his nose—his adorable nose, his most prominent feature—looked beautiful to behold. He seated himself gracefully in an arm-chair, so that a beam of light played on his hair, having first drawn forward another chair and placed it in such a position that Mrs. Bellairs could scarcely avoid sitting in it, about four feet from him. His own chair was one carefully selected whose castors ran easily. He found plenty of time to make all these arrangements, but when, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece, he saw that he had been kept waiting seventeen minutes, he felt that he was indeed flattered. The door opened and Mrs. Bellairs entered, and walked towards him in rather a hurried manner. Then she shook hands, and her fingers remained undisengaged from his for fully the hundredth part of a second after the clasp was over.

‘I am so much obliged to you for coming so punctually,’ said she. ‘I was afraid, Mr. Simkin, that you were never going to call on me any more. You were not at Lady Darnley’s last night.’

‘Were you there?’ said he. ‘I am so sorry that I did not know you were going.’

‘It was the most stupid dance I have ever been at. Not a single person there I cared to speak to, and not one man who could waltz. Do you know, by the way, Mr. Simkin, there is a new waltz just come out in Paris? It will be over here next week, and how shall I contrive to practise it? I cannot bear to do

anything in a ball-room until I am perfect at it. I have got a full description of the step written to me by Dolly Harmesworth, but that, you know, conveys nothing.'

'I know all about it,' said Simkin, delighted. 'I go to Blair's once a fortnight, and I went there yesterday. I learned the step perfectly, and only require a little practice. They will teach it to you in a few hours.'

'I am so much obliged to you for the information. But, Mr. Simkin, I can never learn anything perfectly from them. One wants a real partner, not a professional. Of course they teach the steps beautifully, and I shall go there this afternoon after the park, but to really get into the swing one wants someone one knows and can talk to, as if at a real dance. Now, Mr. Simkin, I wonder whether you would meet me there? We could take our lesson together and practise a bit.'

'Delighted, I am sure, Mrs. Bellairs.'

'What is it like, Mr. Simkin? Just give me an idea of how it goes.'

Mr. Simkin stood up briskly, and proceeded to explain. Mrs. Bellairs looked on with great interest, and said it was quite too delightful, and graceful in the extreme. Simkin felt that the praises of the dance were really meant to apply to the performer, and he became more nimble.

'Just try the step,' said he; 'it is as easy as possible.'

Mrs. Bellairs stood up and began to copy, standing in front of Mr. Simkin watching his feet. She leaned slightly forward, pressing back her skirts, while her little feet 'peeped in and out as though they feared the light.' She soon caught the idea. Simkin waltzed towards her, and his arm glided round her waist. She raised her hand to his shoulder, and off they went round the room. It was somehow quite different from the same thing in a crowded ball-room. He glanced up and met her eyes, high above him, fixed on his. She raised her lower eyelids until her orbs were veiled, while her colour was heightened and glowing.

'Stop, Mr. Simkin,' said she, sitting down, while her chest heaved. 'What would they think if anybody should see us? I hope the people across the way cannot see through the blind, and indeed I don't think they can, for I tried to look in this morning from the top of an omnibus, and I could not.'

'Ah, Mrs. Bellairs,' said Simkin, 'you must promise me quite a lot of dances during the rest of the season.'

'I shall be only too glad, Mr. Simkin, but we must remember Mrs. Grundy. You know my unfortunate position, married as I am to a man who left me a week after our wedding. You understand how particular I must be, and how utterly and completely I rely on you. I must confess that I love waltzing with you, but we must be cautious. I should dearly like to have you as a friend. Will you be one?'

'A fwiend ! A slave, and an adorer, Mrs. Bellairs.'

'Platonic?'

'Strictly platonic, Mrs. Bellairs, as Sir Richard Steel explains it.'

'Mr. Simkin, you have made me so happy. It is so pleasant to think I have one friend I can rely upon.'

'A fwiend and an admirer. You are the most beautiful woman I know of.'

'Flatterer !' said she. 'You have such a terrible reputation, Mr. Simkin.'

'No, weally, have I? I assure you it is undeserved.'

'I am afraid you are an awful flirt, Mr. Simkin, and, although I forgot myself for a moment, I think on consideration I must not venture to be a friend of yours. You are so fickle.'

'Fickle? Don't say so. I assure you I nevaw weally cared for anyone before.'

'You are a deceiver, Mr. Simkin ; your manners are so fascinating that ladies cannot help getting fond of you.'

'Weally, Mrs. Bellairs, this is——'

'And you are so dashing, and have such a taking way with you.'

'No, 'pon my honnaw.'

'Why, a certain lady I know says you are too good-looking for a man. Oh, Mr. Simkin, that is the one you really care about. You are only amusing yourself with me. I know everything, and I shall have nothing more to say to you.'

‘Who is the lady, Mrs. Bellairs? I challenge you to tell me the name.’

‘Mrs. Tacker, so there——’

‘Mrs. Tacker! ’Pon my honnaw——’

‘Oh, don’t attempt to deceive me. Why, she boasts that you are her slave.’

‘Aw, deah me! The poor thing has mistaken my sentiments; I am so sorry.’

‘You like her much better than you do me.’

‘No, most certainly not. I love—like you immensely more.’

‘But she says when you go to call on her you put on your best pair of boots, and when you come to see me you only put on your second best.’

‘This is most serious,’ said he, deeply annoyed. ‘I always have twelve pair, and they are all the same.’

‘And you tell her things you never tell me. You confide in her, you exchange secrets with her. Oh, Mr. Simkin, Mr. Simkin!’ and she raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

‘Weally, this is too bad of her; I never told her any secwets.’

‘You told her all about Mr. Caldwyn’s gambling, and how he was going to be sold up, and is to retrieve his circumstances by a rich marriage.’

‘This is most extwordinary. I never spoke a single word about Mr. Caldwyn to her in my life. Besides, he hasn’t touched a card for two years, and he is not going to be sold up.’

‘Is this true, Mr. Simkin?’

‘On my solemn word of honnaw.’

‘And you do not admire her?’

‘I admire only one, and she is very beautiful.’

‘And you are not her bond-slave?’

‘I am the slave of one, and of one only.’ He slid his chair closer. ‘Oh, Julia—may I call you Julia?’

‘Mr. Simkin, Mr. Simkin, suppose anyone should come in.’

‘Don’t call me Mr. Simkin,’ said he; ‘call me Archimedes—that’s my name.’

His chair moved still closer. One knee bent until it almost touched the carpet. Luxurious silence reigned. Her extended arm fell negligently; a slender white hand lay temptingly near. Ah, naughty Simkin, would you dare? He had almost touched her fingers when—crash! a bolt from the blue. The door was dashed open.

‘Caught yer at last in a hamerous hattitude. That will do. I’m a ’tec, I am,’ said the newcomer, pulling out a greasy pocket-book and a stumpy pencil. ‘Six months on and off I’ve been on this job, and never got a chance afore.’ He proceeded to write rapidly. ‘This is a bad fix for you, my boy. By the laws of India flirting with another man’s wife is a criminal as well as a civil offence, and my employer was born in that country. Seven years’ penal servitude, and five thousand pounds damages. That will be about your figure, governor. Now

sign that,' said he, presenting book and pencil to Mrs. Bellairs, who had just come round.

She signed as if dazed. He handed the book to Simkin, who wrote his name not knowing exactly what he was doing.

'Well, I thought you was a juggins,' said the stranger; 'but I didn't think you were such a soft as to put your name to your own conviction. That puts a nice finish to the job. Ta, ta. I'll come and see you in the dock. Ho revoyer;' and he was gone.

Mrs. Bellairs seemed about to faint again, but thought better of it. She passed her hands wildly before her face; she wrung her fingers; she shuddered.

'Lost!' said she, in a hoarse, despairing tone, glancing wildly at the carpet. Her eyes rolled. Slowly she rose, and seemed as if about to give a wild sustained shriek of terrific volume and piercing intensity.

'For God's sake, don't!' said Simkin, his teeth chattering.

'Unhand me, villain,' said she, pointing with extended arm over his head.

'But my hands are not near you, Mrs. Bellairs,' said he, shrinking back.

'Oh, that my trusting innocence should have been imposed upon! Hush! hark! What is it I hear? It is my husband! Is it? No! YES! Monster, is this more of your villainy?'

Beyond the folding doors was heard a terrific

commotion, which sounded like beating the tattoo on a big drum. Mrs. Bellairs rushed to the folding-doors and threw them open. There lay Miss Browne in an armchair, in a violent fit of hysterics, uttering peals of laughter. Her head was thrown back, and her teeth firmly locked together, while her heels beat the floor with startling reiteration.

‘Oh, bai Jove! Miss Bwowne, you know,’ said Simkin.

‘Oh, horror!’ said Mrs. Bellairs. ‘She will die, and we have no smelling-salts, no feathers. Mr. Simkin, have you been smoking lately? I see you have. Blow up her nose; it is the only thing to save her life. Blow, Mr. Simkin, blow,’ said she, thumping his back as he did so.

The effect was electrical. Kitty sprang up, sneezed violently, and then again fell back; but this time her face was covered with her handkerchief. Her eyes were streaming with tears.

‘And I thought he lov—oved me,’ said she, almost choking. ‘Only last night he pro—pro—proposed to me, and now I find him making love to you;’ and another fit of hysterical laughter supervened.

‘Go, Mr. Simkin,’ said Mrs. Bellairs. ‘You have done harm enough for one day.’

He seized his hat and rushed to the street.

The girls had their laugh out, and put away the detective’s disguise. Mrs. Bellairs wrote to Major Clinton, asking him to dine with them that evening, and bring Major Clackton if he could find him.

They were a very merry party, and the whole story was soon known all over London.

Poor Simkin, reduced to desperation, resolved to leave the country and spend a couple of years in Naples. Fortunately, however, he consulted Major Clinton, who told him to stand to his guns, and who, seeing more of him, began to think that he was not so bad a fellow after all. He told this to Mrs. Bellairs; said he was only twenty-four, and had but recently come into his money. He considered that he was merely a fool, and nothing worse; but that he had had a good lesson, would benefit by it, and be a changed man for the future. Mrs. Bellairs was not one to keep up a feud, so she began to forgive him by degrees, and before long Simkin became known as a sadder and a wiser man.

‘And Kitty,’ said Mrs. Bellairs, ‘now, as you know that story was a slander, remember that Mr. Caldwyn changed his life on your account, and has been constant to you for two years. You owe him at least civility. I will give him a hint that you heard an untruth, which has been disproved. Do not be afraid. I shall not be indiscreet.’

The grand bazaar of the season came off. Mrs. Tacker, by a sore mischance, held a stall with Mrs. Bellairs. Never had that young lady been so lovely, so sparkling, so joyous, so unblushingly mercenary, so devoid of all sense of monetary fairness, and so successful in piling up the spoils of the victims of her wiles.

A middle-aged Imperial Highness was so fascinated with her brilliancy that he remained before her for hours, buying the whole time—she took good care of that. This magnate attracted others, and Mrs. Bellairs soon had four rows of men in front of her stall. They were the best men, too, and all continued purchasers. Mrs. Tacker was forgotten; no one seemed to be conscious of her presence. Her rage gradually became almost uncontrollable. She was eclipsed by the beauty, the sparkle, and the youthfulness of the woman she most hated in the world.

She went to lunch, and took a glass of champagne to restore her shattered equilibrium. Mrs. Bellairs walked in, and sitting down beside her, spoke to her as sweetly as a woman does to the friend she most detests. Something happened. What exactly passed was never known, but Mrs. Tacker had a fiery temper, and Mrs. Bellairs was the last person in the world to suffer a vicious thrust without returning a rough, rapid, rasping riposte as a repartee. Something very terrible must have taken place, for Mrs. Tacker sent for her carriage and drove home.

On the following morning, Mrs. Tacker was looking over the *Morning Post*, when by chance her eye fell on the advertisement of a private detective agency, conducted by J. Stemming, 54, Percy Street, South Belgravia. She shut her lips together very tightly, pondered for a time, and after breakfast proceeded to the address indicated. She was sur-

prised, and rather taken back, at finding that J. Stemming was a lady named Jennie, and was about to retire without stating her business, when it occurred to her that a woman might understand her aim, and attain her object even better than a man. She seated herself again, and before they parted Jennie was engaged to shadow Mrs. Bellairs. A five-pound note changed hands, and Mrs. Tacker departed, feeling that she had left the chase in good hands. Jennie was to unveil the intrigue which Mrs. Tacker believed Mrs. Bellairs to be engaged in.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WHISPERING GALLERY.

MISS BROWNE had business in the city, and encountered Caldwell in Cannon Street. She shook hands with him, quietly ignoring their last interview, and asked him whither he was bound, and if he was busy.

‘I have nothing to do for a couple of hours,’ said he. ‘I have just kept one business engagement, and I have another at one o’clock.’

‘Then,’ said she, ‘show me through St. Paul’s.’

Much against his will he took her round the sights, and down to the crypt, and then they prepared to ascend to the dome by a very long sloping passage, which ascends through the thickness of the walls. In the body of the cathedral and in the

crypts there had been many people about, but on commencing their ascent they found themselves at once alone, and cut off from all the rest of mankind. They both became unaccountably silent.

Till now Caldwyn had been glib enough, as he always was when speaking of a subject which he understood ; but now a nervous dumbness glued his tongue to his teeth. He thought of the years during which the hope of winning this girl had been the one idea which never left his mind sleeping or waking. He thought of how she had repelled him once, and he had sworn to go on. Then he recalled the blank refusal at Earl's Court. He had then been wounded as he thought to the death ; all hope had gone out of his life, and for the first time in his career he had given way to despair. Her refusal had been expressed as if his proposal were abhorrent to her, and he had felt that she never, never could become his. Recently Mrs. Bellairs had told him something. An hour before, if he had seen her before she had seen him, he would have jumped into a hansom and driven anywhere—anywhere to avoid her. When asked to accompany her, he did so as a Sioux brave marches to the torture, determined that no quiver of an eyelid shall reveal the agony within. And she, she had long liked him. She had believed him to possess the manly virtues without the virile vices.

When Mrs. Tacker told her that tale, as malignant as it was untrue, she had felt a keen heart-stab,

which had a poignancy new to her life. When he asked her to marry him, she felt—oh, the bitterness of it! that he should be so excellent and yet so base. Then came the proof of the falsehood of Mrs. Tacker's tale, and a flood of light passed over her soul. He was all the hero she had thought him to be, *sans peur et sans reproche*, and she had treated him shamefully. Ah! if she could only get a chance to recall her refusal. There could be no mistake about the present state of her feelings, and she realized that if he took her answer as final life would be to her little but a blank outlook into a dismal future.

She had asked him to show her over the building, acting merely on the impulse which made her wish to have him near her. She had been watching him intently, herself unseen, during the hour already passed; she had noticed how worn and haggard he looked, the dark marks under his eyes, the lines of pain about his mouth, the sad cadence of his voice, the air of uncontrollable melancholy which pervaded his whole being. She saw his sufferings, and she knew herself to be their cause. She determined if they ever got married she would be very good to him, to compensate for his present pain, and the long, sad waiting of years of constancy. How could she ever explain the reason of her behaviour to him at Earl's Court? She would get Mrs. Bellairs to help her in this, as she had aided her before. But in the crypt he

had spoken of going away ; he had met a wealthy American, who had been very much taken with his invention, and had told him that he would have a great field in the States, and would have this citizen's aid commercially and financially. Miss Browne had asked when he intended to start, and he replied, 'At the end of the week.' She desired to know when he would return, and he had answered 'Never.'

Miss Browne was frankness itself, and we must remember that she had never sworn complete obedience to Mrs. Grundy. As they walked silently upwards she began to think that she owed him a reparation for the chilling coldness of his rejection, and that it was due to both of them that the misunderstanding arising from the treachery of Mrs. Tacker should be rectified. Miss Browne possessed in a very great degree the power of decision, and it had very seldom happened that she had been uncertain how to act. On the few former occasions in which she had wavered she had asked herself what were the dictates of honour, fair dealing, and common-sense, and she had acted accordingly, regardless of consequences. She now began to revert to her usual mode of action in a difficulty. She argued with herself that here was a man who was undoubtedly a very dear friend of hers ; she had heard, and for a time believed, a very gross libel on his character. Did not every maxim of justice, reason, good faith, insist on her at once telling him

of the defamatory story? Her mind was made up, and she was about to commence her tale when——

Since leaving the body of the church her thoughts had been occupied subjectively, not objectively, and only at this moment it dawned upon her that the passage grew narrower and narrower as they ascended. Its width had now decreased so much that, although Caldwyn kept as close to the wall as possible, his elbow unexpectedly touched hers, and involuntarily she began to comprehend the meaning of high tension animal electricity.

For a moment Caldwyn lost his presence of mind, and went on walking by her side, while the walls closed in more and more and the space became more restricted, and they were pressed uncomfortably close together. Under similar circumstances, when two people are very fond indeed of each other, an arm has been known to wander away on its own account, in a completely independent manner, and glide round a neighbouring waist. Still narrower became the way, and the same thought occurred to both—had anyone ever kissed anybody in that very place over which they were now walking?

At this instant Caldwyn recollected himself just in time, and dropped back so as to follow Miss Browne in single file. When about to retire their eyes met, and if she had ever doubted (which she hadn't), she now felt that he loved her.

Another moment and they reached an open doorway, the end of the corridor, and debouched into the

so-called dome, around which ran a railed-in circular gallery, 600 feet around—the celebrated whispering gallery. All sense of being *solus cum solâ* now ceased, as there were half a dozen people leaning over the railings and looking down to the floor of the church, over a hundred feet below.

They went to the railings and looked down, too, into the empty space, but neither of them devoted much attention to the view. Two young ladies who were not far away from them began trying the acoustic qualities of the circular wall. One stood close to our friends, and the other went to the very furthest point of the gallery. They both put their faces close to the wall, and apparently began a rapid interchange of whispers. Miss Browne noticed that she could not hear a word, though the whispers appeared to be perfectly audible to the girl within two feet of her, who with her friend soon afterwards went away.

‘Would you like to try an experiment?’ said Caldwyn.

‘Of course,’ said Miss Browne.

He left her standing where she was, and walked round so as to reach the farthest available point. As he proceeded his brain was in a whirl, his heart beat tumultuously. A moment ago he thought she loved him; but, then, he had thought so before, and been mistaken. And at Earl’s Court her rejection had been of an unusual nature. His brow flushed darkly at the remembrance. On the previous

evening Mrs. Tacker had spoken to him of Miss Browne, in spite of his efforts to escape. She at first praised her highly, and had then mentioned how proud she was of her money, and how she despised fortune-hunters.

As Caldwyn walked away, Miss Browne thought hurriedly over what she could do, and if she could do anything. If only he had given way to his feelings at the critical point, where the corridor became so narrow, all would have come right. And why had he not done so? What a pity he didn't! Then she remembered Earl's Court: he was quite right to curb himself. She would tell him how he had been traduced. Why should she not? She knew he loved her. She put her ear to the wall, and heard a soft whisper, 'Can you hear?' She saw him apparently a quarter of a mile off, his back was towards her; it was quite different from what it would be if they were standing together, with his eyes fixed on hers. For talking purposes he might have been in Paris at a telephone. Then almost the last words spoken to her by Mrs. Bellairs recurred to her mind. She would!—she wouldn't! With a desperate rapidity, as if about to dash through a circle of flames, she put her lips to the wall, and whispered the momentous words:

'Will you marry me, after all?'

It was done; the blood receded from her heart. For a moment she felt faint, and then a delicious sense of happiness pervaded her being. How easy

it is to dare and to venture! This act, once done, seemed so simple, and so sensible. A vista of delight opened before her. How brave he was! how noble! Her ear was bent to the curved sounding-board, when she heard the words: 'No; you are too rich, and too morbid——' Several other words followed, but she had slightly withdrawn her ear, and they were lost. She had heard quite enough for her peace of mind.

When Caldwyn looked round she was gone, and in a surprisingly short time she passed out of the Cathedral by the statue of good Queen Anne. Then she called a hansom, and was driven home.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOUND OUT.

'You are quite certain, Mrs. Stemming, that they will be there,' said Mrs. Tacker.

'I shall know when they are there,' replied Mrs. Stemming; 'I have got a boy on the watch.'

'Very well, then,' said Mrs. Tacker; 'when you know they are together, go to Miss Van Aglar, give her my note, and bring her and Miss Browne to see the lighthouse. Mrs. Gup and I will walk on.'

The speakers were standing in the Hôtel Métropole in Brighton. Half an hour afterwards, Miss Van Aglar, an American lady, doing the sights of

England, received Mrs. Stemming, who, posing as the wife of a lighthouse-keeper, was to take her up the Shoreham lighthouse—Miss Van Aglar had never been over a lighthouse before—and her great friend Kitty Browne, who had come to Brighton to meet her, joined her in her excursion.

Jennie, as personal conductor, drove with them about half-way to the lighthouse. They then alighted and got on to a walk by the beach. On the road above a keen, cutting north-east wind was blowing, but below they were now completely protected by the bluff, which rose perpendicularly to a height of sixty feet, and which ran due east and west. The sun was bright, and its rays were reflected on to them from the white chalk cliff, so that they found themselves in a temperature something like an ordinary June day. The air was still, the heat was almost sultry.

A number of groins run towards the sea. These are walls of solid masonry meant to protect the foreshore from the sweep of the powerful tide, which, rushing from the Land's End, would, were it not for these defences, soon sweep away the beach and undermine the cliffs.

They passed one of these groins, and found Mrs. Gup and Mrs. Tacker seated on a rock.

‘Good afternoon,’ said Miss Van Aglar; ‘we are on our way to the lighthouse. I am so much obliged to you for getting me a guide.’

‘Good afternoon,’ said Mrs. Tacker; ‘allow me

to introduce Mrs. Gup. So glad to see you, Miss Browne.'

'You have not seen the lighthouse,' said Mrs. Tacker to Mrs. Gup. 'Come along; we shall be a regular party.'

Miss Browne had very strong reasons for disliking Mrs. Tacker, but, taken so unexpectedly, she could not be uncivil. They walked on, Kitty thinking for a moment how curious it was that a road so lovely should be so deserted, as not a soul was to be seen except themselves. They approached another groin. Mrs. Tacker, who had been walking in advance with Miss Van Aglar, fell back; Jennie closed up. They advanced in line and turned the end of the sea-wall. There they saw a boat left high and dry by the tide just on the turn; in it sat Mrs. Bellairs, and by her side sat a man. It was no case of a knickerbocker girl this time. His moustache was as small and fair as if he belonged to the First Life Guards—but a moustache it was, and a real one, and nothing sham about it. His arm was round Mrs. Bellairs' waist. He was saying something, and she was stopping his mouth with a shower of kisses, and her raven hair was hanging down her back.

'How do you do, Mrs. Bellairs?' said Mrs. Tacker in a tone of voice—oh, *such* a tone of voice!

'I compute we're rather *de trop*,' said Miss Van Aglar.

‘Oh, Julia! Julia!’ said Miss Browne, under her breath.

Mrs. Gup’s jaw fell. She stared open-mouthed, as if she had seen a ghost.

‘Mr. Bellairs!’ said she.

‘Mrs. Gup! Delighted to see you. Allow me to introduce my wife.’

‘Mrs. Gup and I know each other very well indeed,’ said Mrs. Bellairs. ‘Mrs. Tacker, let me introduce my husband. Hal dear, this is Mrs. Tacker. You know all about her character. Kitty, my darling, lend me a hairpin. I’ve been out for a sail, and I ought to have had a net. Isn’t it quite too delightful to meet so many dear friends’—a curtsy to Mrs. Tacker—‘and affectionate creatures’—another to Mrs. Gup—‘in such an out-of-the-way place? Halbert dear, you have never known anyone come west of Medina Gardens before, have you?’

‘Well, Julia,’ said Mr. Bellairs, ‘our secret is found out. However, we have had a really good time of it, and, indeed, I don’t see why this should make any alteration in our mode of life. I know Mrs. Gup well, and I can thoroughly rely on her treating all this as confidential.’

‘You may be quite certain, Hal, that Mrs. Gup will be as discreet in the future as she has been in the past. On Mrs. Tacker I rely with the greatest confidence. She would not breathe a word to anyone which would have the faintest chance of inter-

fering with me in any way. Would you, dear?' said Mrs. Bellairs to Mrs. Tacker.

'Miss Browne,' said Mr. Bellairs, 'I may almost call you an old friend, so much have I heard of you from my wife. It is only right that you should have an explanation of our little mystery. Before we were married, Julia and myself studied very deeply the great question as to why marriage is so often a failure. I loved her very much, and I wished that her life should be a happy one, not merely for one sweet month, but always.'

'And I wanted you to be always nice, and well dressed, and attentive, and not to become a frumpy old married man,' said Mrs. Bellairs.

'Quite so, dear; and we both made up our minds that marriage might be a very happy state if it were not for domestic life. That is what knocks off the gilding. To have to spend long hours together, with nothing to do but to yawn and get weary of each other, was an outlook too terrible to contemplate; I thought of Julia as she was—free, happy, gay—with no care for the morrow—a darling of society, living through a never-ending round of amusements, and enjoying every moment of life; I compared that picture with Julia worried by household cares—her hair in curl-papers—cross in the mornings—scolding the cook, with slippers down at heel, and a hideous dressing-gown. Could I doom such a butterfly to become a chrysalis, reversing the order of nature? No, it would be

cruelty. And there was I myself with no care or trouble; I could go where I liked, and do what I liked—start for Denver City or Timbuctoo with a mere Gladstone bag—with good clubs, good hunting, good shooting, good dinners without trouble, and good society without expense. Could I bear to think of myself as getting clumsy in waistcoat, and puffy, and bald with the humdrum cares of domestic life—with not a room I could call my own, forced to be always home for tea—compelled to give up all my old pals, and submit to the boredom of knowing a lot of old married people?

“While Bobby is bawling, and Polly is squalling,
And Dad is recalling his bachelor's fare.”

The contemplation of such an ending to our romance was too dreadful. We decided that we would be happy though married, and we put our wits to work to hit on a means of effecting our object. We decided that the one great thing to be avoided in married life is getting weary of each other. We calculated that it generally takes three weeks before continual cooing begins to cloy, so, as we got married on a Wednesday, we separated on the following Tuesday in order to be on the safe side. Since then we have lived an ideal life. Julia enjoys society as much as anyone in London, and I have all the delights of single blessedness, with wedded bliss into the bargain, while we are just as much lovers as when we became engaged. I take her to

every new play that comes out ; we explore all the most pleasant nooks of our own country, and the Continent ; she gets a fit of study, and I help her as long as it lasts. She reads my poems, and says they are beautiful, and she has them all to herself, as no alien eye has ever got beyond the first page. We leave each other and go our different ways before we have time to get *ennuyés*, and it is not possible for this world to contain lives more happy than ours. We are married, we are true to each other, we are dear friends, honest pals, and affectionate and ardent lovers.'

'Yes, Hal, my life has been absolutely happy—except when we leave each other—but it is best so.'

'But what will you do if you have children?' cried Mrs. Gup.

'Put them in the turnstile,' said Mr. Bellairs, 'as the great Jean Jacques Rousseau did. A nursery row would drive me mad !'

Mr. Bellairs put two fingers in his mouth and gave a piercing whistle. A lumbering longshore giant appeared, and, divining the meaning of a nod, began to drag the boat towards the receding ocean.

'Suppose we all go for a sail?' said Mr. Bellairs.

'Yes, Kitty, come—and Miss Van Aglar ; you will find it so jolly. Mrs. Gup, the little boat dances about and leans over so nicely, it gives quite a pleasant feeling of nervousness. You really must come, Mrs. Tacker—come and get seasick. No, really ? I am so sorry you won't.'

‘And this young person,’ continued Mrs. Bellairs, looking at Jennie, ‘I think, more than once, I saw you in Kensington following me. This is a very shallow intrigue. Mrs. Tacker, you are old enough to know better. Please begin another campaign as soon as you can ; I love fighting with you—I delight in triumph. Pardon my mentioning it, but I am sure you would like to know—your hair is not on straight. Good-bye ; I shall look forward to the pleasure of seeing you again.’

They sailed away. Mrs. Gup was well pleased, as she had now stories to tell of both parties. Poor Jennie came off worst of all, for, except that first five-pound-note, she never got a single penny for all her trouble. However, strange events from curious causes spring. The Bellairs felt they had had enough of married romance, and they settled down quietly in Kensington like ordinary people.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

SIR LOUIS VENTNOR paced slowly up and down his breakfast-room in Crescent Street, Piccadilly. His brows were closely knit ; he half unconsciously smoked a cigar, and an air of gloomy anxiety was on his features. He heard a carriage rattle up, and a loud ring at his own door. His servant brought

in a card, on which he saw, surrounded by a deep mourning border, the name 'Lady Tacker.'

Mrs. Tacker walked in, holding a telegram and a handkerchief in her hands.

'I sent my card in advance,' said she, 'to break the surprise to you. Yes, indeed, poor Kenneth died last night in Aden. He was gazetted to his K.C.S.I. on Monday, and died on Tuesday. I hope they wired him the news. Just the old story of the sanguinary country: get knighted and then die in the Red Sea coming home. It's rather *risqué* my coming to see you, but it doesn't matter now, Louis, does it? I wanted to give you the earliest opportunity of proposing, and I won't say no. The best thing for us to do is to get married at once. I propose that we run over to Berlin and get united quietly at the Embassy. Of course, people will talk, but only for a day or two; besides, everyone knows that I haven't seen poor Kenneth for years.'

Sir Louis seemed greatly taken aback.

'Claudine,' said he, 'this is a very serious matter, and not one to be dealt with in a moment.'

'What do you mean?' said she, bridling.

'For some time past,' said Sir Louis, 'I have been thinking very seriously of this marriage question.'

'In anticipation of Kenneth's death?'

'M, yes; and generally, generally——'

'What do you mean by generally?'

'Well, philosophically, and sociologically, and comprehensively—yes, comprehensively.'

‘What nonsense you are talking! Do you mean you won’t marry me?’

‘My dear Claudine, why should you, so recently enfranchised, stoop again to the yoke of bondage? Why be subject to any man? Why should you, now that you are free, again become a man’s slave—his chattel?’

‘Your slave, your chattel?—not the slightest chance of that, my dear!’

‘There I agree with you, but take the converse view. I am now a free man: no one controls me, no one orders me about. Now, my dear Claudine, let us consider the much more likely case of my becoming your slave, your chattel.’

‘You have not found me a tyrant.’

‘Quite true, but then I was not your husband.’

‘You would find me always the same.’

‘Exactly. That is my strongest reason for my present course of action.’

‘Explain yourself, sir.’

‘Claudine, you will always be the same divinely fascinating woman. You will always be beautiful and witty, always the centre of an admiring circle, always attractive, and always followed by more than one. I have met several men lately who knew your husband well. He seems to have been a very fine fellow, good and honest, and very kind to you; yet you were not true to him. Could I expect you to be faithful to me?’

‘Sir,’ said she, springing to her feet, ‘you dare to

insult me! Beware! I have you in my power. Besides, I know Mrs. Stemming, and women talk.'

'And men, too, Lady Tacker. A man I met here stayed with me in Berkshire a couple of months. He was in Syzabad when Granby of the 34th Hussars was there, in the year—let me see—when the young Count Kriptchzki visited him. Lady Tacker, few men can keep a secret. I know who the Count was.'

'You are all creatures beneath contempt,' said she. 'But, Louis, I can trust you?'

'Implicitly, and you can trust this friend of mine. He only told me because I knew of it before—that is to say, I surmised it, and led him to believe I was in the secret.'

'Good-bye, Louis,' said she; 'but think over what I have said. Perhaps I have been too sudden. I should have given you more time. And, Louis, do not misjudge me; I may have had a few juvenile flirtations—well, so had you, so we are quits; but I never really loved anyone before I met you. Good-bye.'

Scarcely had she left when a neat miniature brougham, drawn by a showy pair of Galloways, drove up. The servant proceeded to show up the visitor, but she bounded past him, and dashed into the room.

'Ah, Estelle!' said Sir Louis; 'I am really delighted to see you. You look more charming than ever; I only came to town this morning, and I

proposed calling on you this evening behind the scenes and taking you to a little supper.'

'With pleasure, *mon cher*. And you are really a Milord. And you are unchanged. But still there is a difference; yes, a great difference. And, *mon Dieu*! what a beard!'

'Yes, Estelle, we all change, except you. Come, is our London melancholy?'

'Not at all. Your London is not Paris, but it is not so bad, nevertheless. But I am now in an abysm of despair.'

'Why is that, Estelle? Confide in me; I will see you through any difficulty. But how can you be unhappy? I have been reading the remarks of the press. You are spoken of by all, you are smothered with applause.'

'All that is true—but—— Ah! I must explain. Do you know Tossie Montmorenci? You do not. Well, she is odious, and hates me.'

'Envy, my dear.'

'Yes, it is envy. But to return to my sheeps. At the Frivolité Café Chantant we are all the new womans, and together we agreed that we should all make the proposals to the messieurs. *Ma foi*! but there is nothing new in that.'

'Well?'

'Well, this Tossie, this imbecile, proposed to a Milord, the son of a Duke, and she will marry him. And the other girls say she will be a crow over me. What shall I do?'

‘That is a difficult matter, Estelle.’

‘Not at all difficult ; I will propose to you, and you will marry me. Behold, I kneel. You, the most noble, more handsome than Athos, more spirituel than Aramis. Oh ! if I do not marry a Milord, I shall want my destiny.’

‘Estelle, you are rapidly learning English.’

‘Yes ; it was for you.’

‘Have your fellow fairies taught you the meaning of the phrase, “ Don’t be silly ”?’

‘But, yes.’

‘Then get up ; your nose is getting red.’

Estelle, like a good girl, did as she was bid.

‘But you will help me ?’ said she.

‘Why, certainly. She has caught her heir, but will she cook him ? There is many a slip.’

‘So I told her, and she said in that case she would bring a breach, and that would be quite as good. Now, promise to marry me. Do not do so. I will bring a breach. That will be a pair of breaches ; in fine, I will be revenged on her.’

‘Estelle, remember we are in sober, sensible, staid, moral England, where we all live by rule. What is this Milord’s name ?’

‘Milord Tuft.’

‘Tuft ? Know him well ; a nice boy. Estelle, I can help you. Excuse me a moment.’

He walked to a table, took a much-gilded volume, and turned the leaves rapidly.

‘That makes him not yet twenty,’ said he.

‘Estelle, you have triumphed; Tossie cannot have a breach. Tuft is an infant.’

‘What is it that you mean? *Enfant terrible*, yes.’

‘No, he is an infant, a real infant.’

‘Ah, you do not know him. He is more large than you.’

‘Still he is an infant. By the laws of England every man is an infant until he is twenty-one years of age. Lord Tuft is an infant.’

‘It is droll. Has he a *bonne*?’

‘And, as an infant, he is too young for breaches, so your Tossie cannot have her case.’

‘That is excellent,’ said Estelle.

‘Furthermore, I will give you a revenge much more complete. Take supper with me this evening. I will get Lord Tuft to meet you. We shall have a supper fit for the Grand-Duchess of Gerolstein. Bring any friend of yours for me to talk to; I don’t care whom, only she must be as handsome as yourself.’

‘But it is impossible.’

‘Nothing is impossible to a girl with your wit, who wishes to join in a supper of perfection, and to meet a lord.’

‘You raise me to heaven.’

‘This will be a revenge to gladden your heart. Take him from Tossie.’

‘This is top-tip.’

‘We will have a supper, as in the old days. May I be certain you will come?’

‘*Ma foi !* I shall not fail,’ said Estelle, as she bade him a graceful adieu.

‘*Vogue la galère,*’ said Ventnor to himself. ‘One more joyous evening of luxury, and then—I cannot fly. To leave all this. To know luxury and leave it is little, but to come back, and leave it again, is too horrible. Ah, Hamlet, my friend! What griefs had you? You knew not what trouble was.

“And with a bare bodkin end it.”

“To die—to sleep.”’

He passed through the inner door, walked down three steps, along a very narrow passage, up three steps, and into a small room. It was a laboratory uncommonly well fitted up for an amateur’s.

There was a good deal of electrical apparatus, including two batteries made for the hip pocket, to balance the revolver, the apparatus by the aid of which American soldiers of the telegraph companies performed such wonders in the great war of Secesh. He took off his coat, and was proceeding to examine some instruments, when a servant knocked and informed him that a lady was waiting to see him in the drawing-room; she would not give her name.

A little before this hour Jennie Stemming paced Kensington Gardens in deep thought. She walked over the very spot where a King of England had been robbed of his watch, chain, and seals by a daring thief. Would not courage and daring do anything? Had not Jim often told her so? And then

she sighed very slightly. Poor Jim! After all, he was not so bad, and of late a haunting idea began to make her occasionally think that her own great talents were not sufficient to secure success without Jim's guidance.

Jennie pondered deeply. She held a secret, a great one. How should she use it? She saw her way clearly to the answer to that question. She had done so for some weeks; but now she determined that time must not be lost.

Long she had waited for the Count de Villers-Saxel; but 'He cometh not,' she cried. Slowly and sorrowfully she had come to the conclusion that he was a gay deceiver. Poor Jim was the best of the lot, after all. But she must brace up her courage. She held the winning card: she could not fail.

The Count de Villers-Saxel had guided her thoughts into high places. For months she had never ceased comparing herself with every titled lady she could see, much to their disadvantage. She must be 'your ladyship.' With that aim she could risk anything, do anything. And her child, her boy (she felt it was bound to be a boy), must be born heir to a title, and afterwards bear it himself. She had pictured to herself what he would be. How would the title 'Sir Louis' suit him?

Her mind was made up. She walked to Palace Gate, called a hansom, was driven along Knightsbridge and Piccadilly, turned into Crescent Street,

paid the cabby through the roof, descended, knocked, and was shown to the drawing-room.

Her courage rose as the moment for action approached.

Sir Louis entered, shook hands with her, and handed her a chair, as he found her standing.

‘What is it, Mrs. Stemming?’ said he. ‘Is there anything new?’

He could not help betraying anxiety.

‘Nothing,’ said she, ‘nothing whatever.’

‘That’s all right,’ said he, evidently much relieved. ‘Now, Mrs. Stemming, what can I do for you? It will give me only too much pleasure to be of use to you in any way.’

Now, Jennie’s assurance was not small, but for a moment she hesitated. She sat there determined to make this man marry her, but she did not quite know how to begin.

‘Sir Louis,’ said she, ‘I am afraid our meetings have been noticed.’

‘I hope not,’ said he earnestly.

‘I am afraid so, and you know how distressing this must be.’

‘Well, but, Mrs. Stemming, how can this be? You meet many people, so do I. Who has any right to say whether we should see each other or not?’

‘People are so scandalous,’ said she, and here a laced handkerchief was raised to her eyes.

Jennie had rehearsed the whole scene over and over.

‘Mrs. Stemming, this does not seem common-sense.’

‘And you are such a handsome man, Sir Louis—that’s the reason people talk.’

‘Really, Mrs. Stemming, this is——’

‘And oh, Sir Louis, I never really cared for my husband. Ours was a *mariage de convenance* to join our families; but when I met you, your fascinating qualities won my poor innocent heart.’

‘Mrs. Stemming, this is rot!’

‘Others may blame me, but you should not’ (sob).
‘I love you. Is that a fault? I cannot help it. I feel an uncontrollable impulse——’

Sir Louis stepped back.

‘Mrs. Stemming,’ said he, as he walked towards the bell-pull, ‘allow me to order a cab.’

‘No,’ said she, ‘do not order a cab. If you do, I shall drive straight to Scotland Yard.’

He stopped, drew himself up, and fixed on her a gaze so cold, calm, and piercing, that she quailed.

She quailed, but only for a moment. He had stopped, and that showed his hesitation. They looked at each other like duellists.

‘And what would you tell at Scotland Yard?’

‘I would tell everything.’

‘And what is everything?’

‘I would tell that you have got me to shield you from justice, to give accounts of what my poor dead husband, an honest detective, was finding out, to

keep you informed of what the police were doing against you—the police, Sir Louis, the police.’

‘And of what value is all that? I am a gentleman. I find that some scoundrel is laying plans to blackmail me, and has employed a detective to watch me, so as to manufacture evidence to aid him in his fabrications. He is probably a second Arthur Orton, about to contest my title. I employ the detective’s wife to tap the enemy’s wires. What is there dishonourable in that? The law cannot touch me, my equals will acquit me of all blame.’

‘Sir Louis, listen to me. Do not force me to come to extremities. What lovelier bride can you wish for? I will be a true, loving, good, and obedient wife to you, and I shall make you happy. I am clever. Let us go abroad for a year. I know I am not yet perfect in my manners; but I shall study, observe, copy and improve on the best models of lady-like behaviour, and make you proud to possess me.’

‘Mrs. Stemming, I cannot accept your most flattering offer.’

‘You won’t, won’t you?’

‘No——’

‘But you must.’

‘Why?’

‘Because YOU MURDERED MY HUSBAND!’

As she said these terrible words, she rose. Her attitude was superb.

For a time there was the silence of death.

Then Sir Louis spoke :

‘And you would wish to marry the man whom you believe to have murdered your husband ?’

‘Yes, and why not ? You are the very one who is bound to make up for my loss. David murdered Uriah, and didn’t he marry the widow Bathsheba ? And Alexander the Great, he killed Darius, and married the widow. There it is in a lovely picture in the National Gallery, painted by Mr. Veronese.’

Sir Louis looked at her intently, as if reading her soul and measuring her capabilities, with a gaze as intense as the look of a general in the old days before the crisis of an engagement. Then a smile broke over his features.

‘Sit down, Mrs. Stemming,’ said he ; ‘we are not at the footlights.’

She sat down.

‘Mrs. Stemming, have you ever felt within yourself any yearnings towards lunacy ?’

‘No.’

‘Or idiotcy ?’

‘No.’

‘Then, how could you be so foolish as to think for one moment that an old man of the world, such as I am, could be checkmated by a half-educated girl like you ? Let me tell you a story. Before commencing, however, let me state that your accusation is pure nonsense. My movements are well known. I slept here, breakfasted here, rode in the park, played a rubber at my club, and hundreds of

people who know me well saw me, spoke to me, lunched with me, dined with me day by day during the time to which you allude. Mrs. Stemming, all your statement is bounce, pure and simple. All you know about me might be placarded at Charing Cross and do me no harm. But I prefer not being talked about in any manner. Now for my story.

‘In a sweet village in Berkshire, which you very well know, there is a fine old-fashioned inn named the Tun and Distaff—one of the great old coaching caravansarais which has been lately restored to its pristine glories by cyclists. In this inn, a few years ago, were a barman and waitress, she being a remarkably pretty Jersey woman, and he noted as the smartest drawer in that part of England. A railway was being made close by, and the engineer brought to the inn a large sum of money to pay the workmen. It was placed in the safe—it was stolen.

‘The barman was convicted for the theft. He got two years’ hard. He put by the money; he did his time without wincing, and with this capital started in business on his release.

‘The pretty waitress then married him. It was she who had kept the money. It was she, not he, who stole the keys of the safe from her mistress; it was she, not he, who committed the actual robbery, and took the gold—nearly two hundred pounds—from the safe. It was she who travelled twenty miles by rail and placed it in a bank, signing a false name, but with handwriting as to which there can

be no mistake. That pretty waitress, Mrs. Stemming, was yourself.

‘The whole of this is written down here, with all the proofs.’ Sir Louis walked to a Chinese cabinet, and opening a secret drawer, took out a small parcel. ‘There are four other copies in safe hands. If anything should happen to me they will be at once put in the hands of the police. You were not so clever then as you are now. You left proofs behind you all over the place. Mrs. Stemming, your husband got two years’ hard from a very lenient judge; you might get five.

‘Mrs. Stemming, my rule of life is, “Let me alone, and I’ll let you alone.” I hurt no one who does not try to injure me, but if roused I am absolutely ruthless. If you even attempt to cause me the slightest annoyance you shall at once get five years’ penal servitude. I will visit the prison and promise a hundred pounds to anyone in charge who can get you flogged.’ He rang the bell. ‘Call a hansom for Mrs. Stemming. I must beg you to excuse my going down with you.’

He bowed ceremoniously, and the interview closed. Sir Louis stood as if wearied.

‘I believe she is safe,’ said he. ‘I was half afraid I was putting on the embroidery too thick. What a lot of nonsense a clever woman will listen to! However, she would get a year or six months without a doubt if it could be proved—but it can’t. Nothing like bluff!’ And he looked at the packet

which he had taken from the secret drawer of the Chinese cabinet.

It contained flies.

He then sat down beside the central table; his hands clasped his forehead.

'But I am threatened by both,' said he almost inaudibly; 'and can two women keep silence? Impossible.'

Then, in spite of himself, his thoughts turned to that girl whom he had really loved, whom he still continued to love with an infatuation which he could not control. He had sought all methods of trying to forget. He had even flirted with another. He thought of this with poignant remorse. Should he write to her before he died? What useless madness it would be to do so; yet if the real truth were known to her, she might grant a little pity, even though she might greatly condemn. And he had never written to her—never! And his lips were sealed. And now he had heard that she was to wed another. Dared he write? might he write? A feeling came over him of the delirious joy it would be to pen words she might see. He seized a pen and began to write with feverish haste.

After half an hour he ceased. He remembered the telephone; he locked carefully in a despatch box the half-written letter, which already contained a score of pages. He ordered a hansom and hurriedly drove towards Ebury Bridge.

He entered a house in Pimlico, and made his way

to the attic floor. He took out a key, the work of a noted maker, and opening the door, entered a small, low, shabby room, containing no furniture except a table and a chair. Attached to the wall was a telephone, from which a wire ran out through the corner of a skylight.

‘This source of information can be used no more,’ said he.

He cut the wire and removed the apparatus from the wall. He then stood on the table and opened the skylight. He twisted a couple of yards of the wire so as to make it into a knot with weight enough to be thrown. He stood at his full height, and was preparing to fling the coil, when a man’s face appeared at the window. He stared at the man, the man stared at him. It was a man named Perkins, his own groom, who seemed surprised, and rapidly disappeared.

* * * * *

Mr. Hawke was in his office talking to Athos, when Mr. Perkins was announced. Now, Mr. Perkins was a detective, who, to watch Sir Louis, had entered his service as a groom.

He entered breathlessly, having run up the stairs three at a time.

‘Well, Mr. Perkins,’ said Hawke, ‘any information?’

‘Mr. Hawke,’ said he, ‘I think I mentioned that I learned the trade of a telephone wire-layer, as it

struck me that now and then a good deal might be learned from roof-tops, like *Le Diable Boiteux*. I determined to have a look at Mrs. Stemming's house from the summit. A man whose acquaintance I had made was examining wires not far off, and I easily got him to let me take his place.

'When I got on the roof of the house in which Mrs. Stemming lives, I saw an insulated wire from the skylight. I followed it along the roofs of the houses, until I came to a by-street. I turned along this route, still following the wire, until it again entered an attic.

'I tried to peep through for information, when the skylight opened, and a man holding a coil of the wire stared at me.'

'Who was it?'

'Sir Louis Ventnor.'

'This is grave news,' said Hawke; 'he has been all along in communication with Mrs. Stemming.'

'And therefore knew of her husband's movements.'

'This,' said Athos, 'goes against Brisure's theory.'

'But how on earth is it we did not discover this before?'

'You must remember, Mr. Hawke,' said Perkins, 'that it is only by accident it has now been found out. I did not go to-day to discover means of communication between Sir Louis and Mrs. Stemming. I simply went to reconnoitre, and lay plans for getting into her rooms at some future period, during

her absence, and hunting for proofs. The telephone wire I only discovered by chance.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Hawke. 'And no one could suspect their meeting recently, as they did not meet. But their communication did not commence by the installation of the telephone. They must have met before more than once. How is it that we did not find out that?'

'You must remember,' said Mr. Perkins, 'that in those days we did not watch Mrs. Stemming at all, and Sir Louis was watched by Mrs. Stemming's husband, whose movements were known to and could be evaded by her.'

'That is true,' said Mr. Hawke. 'This discovery throws quite a new light on the business. If Sir Louis was kept informed of Jim Stemming's doings, he must have known that he had solved the Eiffel mystery. Hence a reason for his committing the other murder. He would never have killed him for the jewels. A ruined man might do such a thing, but not a person in a good position, with Sir Louis's income, and unembarrassed.'

Hawke thought for a few minutes.

'He saw you, Mr. Perkins?'

'He looked me straight in the face.'

'And recognised you?'

'I am certain he did. I was got up to look very different from a groom, but then, he only saw my face, and not my dress. Besides, if he had thought me to be a mere workman, he would not have been

frightened. But he turned pale, and everything betokened a severe nervous shock.'

'Then he knows he is watched, and he will behave accordingly.'

Mr. Hawke touched a bell, and a policeman entered. Hawke desired the presence of two men, whom he put on to follow Sir Louis wherever he went, even if he should go to America. He rapidly supplied each with written authority to obtain aid, or money, if necessary, for travelling expenses, from the police authorities all over England.

Next morning he was informed that Sir Louis had gone to Dover.

CHAPTER XXIV

ORDINARY LIFE.

WHEN Caldwyn saw that Miss Browne had vanished from the Whispering Gallery, he hurried out, jumped into a hansom, and went full gallop to her house. He saw her entering as he drove up, knocked, and was refused admittance.

Miss Browne had not heard fully ; his second sentence condoned his first.

But now a great change came over Caldwyn's prospects. His invention was taken up by the War Office, and fortune smiled. Mrs. Bellairs again aided, Mrs. Tacker's duplicity was explained, Caldwyn

again proposed, and was accepted, and the betrothed settled down to continuous bliss.

But, alas! there happened a lovers' quarrel. Not a serious one, but enough to make both unhappy. Mrs. Bellairs came to see Kitty, and found her in tears over a letter from Caldwell.

Mrs. Bellairs read the letter, her brows became puckered.

'Send him no answer,' said she; 'send him no explanation. Take no notice of him whatever, until he shall have apologized for this tissue of nonsense. My goodness! what does the man want? He called you morbid. He described himself. He has been mooning about you for so many years that his brain has become misty. Why did he not propose to you like a man a fortnight after he met you?'

'Then I should have refused him.'

'Well, why did he not propose when he met you again at the beginning of the season?'

'Then also I would have refused him.'

'Well, at all events he did win you ultimately, and now that everything runs smoothly, hoity-toity, our Don Quixote must challenge another wind-mill. The really true state of the case,' continued Mrs. Bellairs, 'is that he has an inner feeling that his ardour has been too much obscured by his timidity, and he knows that women are liable to despise a man who is wanting in *élan*. He was cowed by his respect for you. Yes, we women like respect; but there may be too much of a good

thing. I assure you, Halbert behaved in quite a different manner. He feels that you may consider that he has been wanting in courage, and now he wishes to assert himself. Don't put up with such absurdities.'

The door opened, and the servant announced the Rev. Jeremiah Jonathan N. Smallpiece.

'My dear child, how are you?' said he, advancing to Miss Browne.

'I am so delighted to see you,' said she, clasping both his hands.

He was introduced to Mrs. Bellairs.

'Mrs. Bellairs,' said he—'I am going to dine with you this evening, Mrs. Bellairs.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said Mrs. Bellairs.

'Yes,' said Mr. Smallpiece, 'I have just been taking lunch with your husband. I met him in Regent Street, and I took him into the Langham. We had a long talk about old times, and friends, and about one friend in particular—old to me, new to him—my dear child, Kitty Browne.'

'You will dine with us?' said Mrs. Bellairs to Miss Browne.

'Certainly; and you will all dine with us to-morrow.'

'Thanks, much,' said he, 'but to-morrow evening I must be in Edinburgh, whence I go on to John O'Groat's House. Often as I have been across the Atlantic, I have never been through England, and I want to see it from Stroma to Land's End, from

St. David's to Dover. Next time I go to the East I may not return through this country.'

'When will that be?' said Mrs. Bellairs.

'In eight years' time,' said he. 'My church sends me over once every eight years. We hope to convert the Buddhists.'

Now, Mr. Smallpiece was seventy-five.

Miss Browne got to Mrs. Bellairs' house not long before the dinner-hour. They now lived like ordinary people. A couple of minutes previous to the appointed time Mr. Smallpiece arrived. His day had been a very busy one, as every day was with him; he had the capacity of getting through three times as much work as any ordinary man, yet never seemed fatigued.

Mrs. Bellairs received him with effusion.

'You must have been surprised at my not knowing you this morning,' said she. 'My husband is never tired of talking of you, but although I suppose I must have been told your name, I always heard of you as "the apostle."''

Never had a title been better applied. Mr. Smallpiece was below the middle size, and very slight, but the alertness of his movements showed that his physical nervous energy was extraordinary. His forehead was of great height, and would have been the delight of a phrenologist. His eyes were so bright as to almost sparkle; his features were delicate, refined, and mobile, and expressed by turns the loftiest courage and self-sacrifice, or the

gentlest of pity for the inevitable sufferings of humanity. His snow-white hair was long and very fine, and it needed but a first glance to recognise that he possessed the eloquence, the zeal, the fiery faith, and the power of swaying masses of mankind, which had caused his name to be known wherever the English language is spoken. But his sacerdotalism he left behind him in the pulpit. Among men he moved as a man. He knew not the meaning of cant, and in ordinary life, with his mass of varied information, his learning, and his knowledge of human nature, there sometimes appeared an unsophisticated innocence almost child-like.

He had come home by the Karakorum Pass, and gone a little out of his way to view the Pamirs. He had ascended Mount Tagharma, the roof of the world, higher than anyone had gone before, and returned by the Kizil Art mountains, Sofi Khurghan, and the Gulcha Pass to Samarkand. Once there, he reckoned himself as practically at home ; the journey across Turkestan, the Caucasus and Russia, was a mere trifle.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Smallpiece to Bellairs, ‘that was a grand day when we discovered the secret of the San-Po. The San-Po, Mrs. Bellairs, is one of the most mighty rivers in the world, and it disappears for seventy miles into a gorge which no human foot had ever trod. It reappeared as the Irrawaddie, or as the Brahmaputra ; no man in those days could

tell which, although for many years this had been known as one of the greatest problems of geography. A fine fellow that K2 was.'

'Indeed he was,' said Bellairs.

'Who was he?' said Mrs. Bellairs.

'He was a Hindu, Mrs. Bellairs, and a splendid fellow, a man India should be proud of, and Number Three as we called him—there was an Englishman for you. I wish I could take him over with me to the States to show my fellow-citizens that England can grow as fine men as even our free country can produce.'

'You beat both him and me in climbing,' said Bellairs.

'I can climb,' said Mr. Smallpiece; 'but it was a lucky thing that Number Three had his great strength. I was going right over a glacier when he caught me by the ankle. Ugh! what a grip he gave me! But it saved my life. Mrs. Bellairs, that was one of the finest men I ever met; he was so clever, and yet so simple, so brave and so modest, and a thoroughly good man. If I ever had had a daughter, I would like to place the keeping of her happiness in that man's hands.'

The evening passed very pleasantly. At parting Mr. Smallpiece asked Miss Browne to come and breakfast with him at the Langham next morning, as he must leave at mid-day, and he had much to say to her. Kitty agreed.

Next morning Miss Browne went to the Langham,

and there in a private room found Mr. Smallpiece waiting for her. Breakfast was laid. They shook hands, when he said :

‘My dear child, an old friend of mine is about to call. He is the gentleman we spoke of last night, the one who saved my life. Would you mind my asking him to breakfast?’

‘Nothing would please me more,’ said she, ‘than to meet this hero.’

The servant announced Mr. Caldwyn.

‘I was speaking of you last night,’ said Mr. Smallpiece, ‘soon after I saw you. Now, my dears, don’t mind me,’ said he, looking out of the window.

Miss Browne and Caldwyn shook hands. There was just a suspicion of a constraint. Caldwyn remembered his letter, and so did she.

Breakfast began. Mr. Smallpiece spoke rapidly, and with a knowledge of all countries and all peoples. He then spoke of his own glorious country and of his beloved flock. Breakfast was removed, a short pause ensued, and then Mr. Smallpiece spoke :

‘My children,’ said he, ‘I am old enough to be your grandfather, and I know you well enough to proffer advice, and you both know me well enough to take what I say in good part. I have known this girl since her infancy. She is one to be a perfect wife. I knew Mr. Caldwyn in trying scenes. He is a man to make any woman happy. You both have your faults. So have we all. Can you meet

a perfect being? No. You are both proud; do not allow your pride to spoil your lives. Do not risk another misunderstanding. Make an old man happy. Let me see you married before I resume my travels—let me see again one more new link in the tie which binds the two great nations I love so well. You agree? Deliberate as long as you wish, but when prepared to act, act at once. *Ek dum*,* as we used to say in the Himalayas. My dear son, my time is short; I leave by the one-forty.'

A knock came to the door, and the servant introduced Mr. and Mrs. Bellairs.

'Sidney, my dear boy!' cried Caldwyn, springing up and advancing with extended hand.

'Bellairs, my boy—I'm Bellairs now. A maternal uncle left me a piece of ground on condition of my taking his name.'

'I would have told you long ago, Mr. Caldwyn,' said Mrs. Bellairs, 'but my husband insisted on my allowing him to tell you himself, and he has always been away when you were in town.'

'Now there is something to be done,' said Mr. Smallpiece.

'Be commanding officer of this force, sir,' said Bellairs, saluting.

'You gentlemen go and get a licence. I have a call to make, and these ladies will come with me and point out the sights as we travel. A carriage is waiting for us; and, where I call, I shall not keep

* At once.

them more than ten minutes. We must all meet in Bartley Street at eleven o'clock.'

They rendezvoused at the prescribed time and place. It was close to a church. We may state, as a piece of private information, that Mr. Smallpiece's visit had been to a clergyman, an old friend of his. They entered the church; all was ready; Mr. and Mrs. Bellairs were witnesses, and Miss Browne wrote her maiden name for the last time, and came out of the building Mrs. Caldwyn.

They returned to the Langham, whence Mrs. Bellairs and Mrs. Caldwyn went away to pack up some things, while the three gentlemen remained talking about old times. The two ladies came back with a pile of luggage. They then sat down to a wedding-breakfast, which Mr. Smallpiece had provided. To eat two breakfasts in one morning was a little trying, but Mr. and Mrs. Bellairs had breakfasted very early, and were quite ready for an early lunch. Caldwyn had sent for his man, who went and brought everything packed up. The bride bade good-bye, and the happiest pair in England started for Tunbridge Wells. Mr. Smallpiece caught the one-forty.

CHAPTER XXV

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

PORTHOS and Aramis walked up Regent Street. It was their first visit to London. They were pleased and yet disappointed ; they saw much to admire, but the bright memory of their own city was not dimmed by the contrast. Even as they strolled slowly along, a November fog, a 'London particular,' followed them, engulfed them, and swept stealthily on towards the higher ground.

'This is unfortunate,' said Aramis ; 'for, much as we hear of these sooty mists, yet Athos informs me that a real specimen fog only occurs half a dozen times a year.'

'But do you not rather think we are very fortunate?' said Porthos. 'Here we are, already two days in this city. We leave in a few hours. Fancy having to bid good-bye to London without having seen its particular speciality, the one gift in which it is supreme, the one production in which it excels all cities, ancient and modern.'

'Well, I could willingly have postponed this pleasure until my next visit. Porthos, I can see you, but not well. Can you see me? I am not so large as yourself, nor do I possess an outline so distinct.'

'I can see you by looking at the place where

your voice comes from. Is that a lamp, or is it my imagination ?'

'It must be a lamp, for I have knocked my elbow against the post. Now to find our place of rendezvous. Let us leave the kerbstone ; keep close to the wall. Here is a large doorway, with lights inside. Let us enter. Porthos, we are saved ; this is our place of rendezvous—this is Blanchard's.'

They entered and looked around, and saw Mr. Perkins sitting at a table in a corner. They went over, shook hands with him, and sat down. Mr. Perkins was more of an amateur detective than a professional. He was a very gentlemanly fellow, but delighted in disguising himself as a groom, or muffin-man, or country yokel. Porthos wished for absinthe, as the natural precursor of dinner, and asked Mr. Perkins to join. The latter, who had all an Englishman's horror of the insinuating green liquid, took something else instead.

Mr. Perkins was rather fidgety, as he was almost late for an important professional engagement elsewhere, and his business here was to meet the three friends, Athos being one. Athos had gone to Bristol the day before, and should have met them this evening. He was already late for his appointment — an unusual thing with the punctilious Athos.

Mr. Perkins told the friends that Sir Louis had gone to Dover. He was there under surveillance. Completing the chain of evidence was only a matter

of time. It was known that he had left his London house the day before the murder of Jim Stemming, and the thing now to be done was to trace his movements during the following forty-eight hours.

‘But this missing link is a very serious break in the chain,’ said Aramis. ‘And you may be certain he went well disguised.’

‘It is a serious break,’ said Perkins; ‘of that there can be no doubt; and that he was disguised, we may regard as a settled matter. But there are certain things which cannot be disguised. There is his height; there is his figure. Of course, he might pad that up; but that is just the thing which he as a man is most unlikely to have thought of. Then there is his walk, which is a very noticeable one. Again, there is his voice; there is no disguising that. It is deep, much more so than you would expect from a man of his build, and, again, his accent is enough to track a man anywhere.’

‘We have little doubt that we have traced him a part of his journey by these peculiarities. We have discovered a cabby who took a gentleman up in Euston Road, and drove him to Liverpool Street station. From the dates and the description, we believe that this is our man. We next find the same gentleman on the Antwerp boat, spending almost the whole night pacing up and down the quarter-deck, showing clearly the old traveller, as every other passenger was seasick. I followed his track to Antwerp, and there I handed over the continuation of the work

to an agent of ours, as I had to return on account of other business.

‘We cannot yet arrest him. Scotland Yard has had the best legal opinion, but we cannot yet get a warrant. We are greatly afraid of his bolting.’

‘But that can easily be stopped,’ said Aramis. ‘Or he can be followed, or on a charge of murder he can be extradited.’

‘It is not so easy as you think to stop him without a warrant. And following him is not so simple. In such circumstances an ordinary criminal would make for America, North or South. He seeks for a wide field in which to get lost, and where he can meet people speaking his own language. Ships for America start only from certain places, and they can be all seen to. But Sir Louis is a man with money and experience. He may hire a steam yacht to pick him up on the south coast. He takes long walks from Dover every day along the cliffs or along the beach. Suppose a steam yacht runs in and takes him on board, in an hour he is out of sight, and he leaves no track behind him. He may go to Venezuela, or get lost in the middle of Brazil, or go to Okhotsk, or settle on the Euphrates, where I am told life can be made very agreeable.’

‘It was unlucky that he saw you on the roof,’ said Aramis.

‘Yes,’ said Perkins. ‘It was very unfortunate, but it could not be helped; it occurred through no error on my part, but it gave him warning. On the other

hand, it helped us, as it proved that he had information from the murdered man's wife.'

'Do you think,' said Aramis, 'that she was in league with him to have her husband killed?'

'Not at all,' said Perkins. 'No Englishwoman would do that. I don't pretend that we are better than other people, but each nation has its own kind of crimes. Now, that is not our style. A woman in England bad enough for mariticide would use poison.'

'How did he look when he saw you on the roof?'

'Guilty,' said Perkins. 'And that look helped on our case. There is a great charm in detective work. There is the zest of pursuit, natural to all carnivorous animals, and there is the playing of the game, pitting wit against wit, skill against skill. It often happens, however, that, when starting a case, I feel myself occasionally checked in my progress by the idea that I may be pursuing an innocent man. All feeling of that sort ceased after the meeting on the roof. I saw guilt—unmistakable guilt—on his face, and I saw fear also.'

'How did he behave when he again met you as his groom?'

'Since that moment I have not seen him,' said Mr. Perkins. 'That evening he left for Dover, and next day his man paid off half the servants, myself among the number.'

Mr. Perkins spoke throughout as if the wall at his

back had ears. Although no one was near them, he seemed so to manage his voice as to pitch each word into the listening ears, so that no distinct articulate sounds travelled up the room.

‘All this is very incriminating,’ said Porthos, ‘and yet what is it but mere circumstantial evidence? And even the most talented of detectives have ere this made mistakes. I still think there must be some huge error. I cannot believe that our old friend Dunne would have murdered a man for jewels. Aramis, for how many years was he our chosen friend? Could a man have lived with us the life we led, of a friendship so intimate, and have hidden from us the evil heart of a murderer? It is impossible.’

‘Ah, Porthos,’ said Aramis, ‘I used almost the same words to Athos. But day by day, to my grief—to my bitter grief—I saw the chain of evidence more and more firmly bound around him. As in Doré’s fearful picture of Eugene Aram in the forest, each leaf we look at assumes the form of a finger pointing at him—the guilty one.’

‘Aramis,’ said Porthos, ‘you have convinced my reason, but not my heart. Here comes Athos.’

Athos entered hurriedly, excusing himself for his lateness. He sat down, politely saluting Mr. Perkins.

‘Athos,’ said Aramis, ‘yesterday morning a telegram came for you to your rooms. As you were away, and moving rapidly, I thought you would receive it most quickly if I brought it here.’

‘Thanks,’ said Athos. He took the message, opened and read it, drew a deep breath, and said :

‘Brisure wires: “Meet me at Hawke’s to-morrow at six o’clock sharp ; very serious. Most important facts have been discovered.” It is now six o’clock, less five minutes. Garçon, a hansom at once. I must go to him now, or I may miss him. If I see him at once I shall bring him back with me, and we will discuss matters as we dine. Have you ordered dinner in a private room ?’

‘Yes,’ said Porthos.

‘On the other hand, I may not be able to bring him back, or to return myself. If I am not back in fifteen minutes, go to dinner without me. If delayed, I shall send you a message.’

‘I can wait here for ten minutes more,’ said Perkins. ‘If by that time I do not see or hear from you, I shall proceed on a business which may take an hour. I shall send word here every half-hour, through the nearest policeman on point duty. I am most anxious to hear Brisure’s news.’

Athos departed, having procured a link-boy to precede his hansom.

‘Brisure,’ said Porthos, ‘believed that the waiter Alphonse was the guilty person. I still think so, too. Brisure is a very able man.’

‘No doubt,’ said Perkins. ‘And Monsieur Brisure had very good grounds for his views and his belief, until we discovered that Sir Louis had secret telephonic communication with the murdered man’s

wife. That fact knocks all the stuffing out of Monsieur Brisure's argument.'

'Well,' said Porthos, 'we are not the police ; I shall do nothing to aid this pursuit.'

'Nor I,' said Aramis. 'It is none of our business, but for Athos it is different. The Prince saved his life and his honour, and he is bound to remember his cruel end ; besides, he is executor for the Prince's friend, Monsieur Gunnis Sing, so he is bound to unmask the criminal.'

Scarcely had Aramis said these words when he started ; his eyes became fixed as if he saw a ghost. He was between the two others ; he plucked Perkins's sleeve, and whispered :

'You said he was in Dover, and there he is.'

'Where ?' said Perkins, also in a very low voice, and looking eagerly in the same direction as Aramis.

'There before you.'

'Who ?'

'Sir Louis Ventnor.'

'Which ?'

'Why, he who is handing his coat to that gray-haired waiter.'

'That's not Sir Louis Ventnor,' said Perkins.

'I declare to you that it is ; he has shaved off his beard ; that, to you, is a disguise.'

'No man could disguise himself like that,' said Perkins. 'I know what a disguise can do, and I know what it cannot do. The two men differ by two inches in height, and by two stone in weight. That

is not padding, that is wiry muscle; besides, the back of that man's head is an inch wider than Sir Louis's. A man cannot disguise his skull. That man is no more Sir Louis Ventnor than he is the King of Kumasi.'

Porthos listened with distended eyes.

The stranger, who had been giving orders for his dinner, turned and looked around the room to select a table. He saw our friends. His face beamed with delight. He walked eagerly forward with a hand extended to each.

'Porthos! Aramis!' said he.

Aramis arose.

'Are you Sir Louis Ventnor?' he said.

'Wall, when I arose this morning I was Roderick V Dunne. I grant you I lost myself in the fog an hour ago. I may have found some other man by mistake, but it is most improbable that I should have made such an error of judgment.'

'Then they are all wrong,' cried Porthos. 'Ah, Dunne, my dear friend, my old companion, embrace me—embrace me!' And the huge giant, almost blubbering, took Dunne in his arms, squeezed him until he almost made his breastbone crack, and kissed him repeatedly on both cheeks.

'Easy all!' said Dunne.

'Dunne, my dear friend,' said Aramis, pressing his hand, 'I am delighted to see you.'

'And I to see you. What a fortunate fog to cast me ashore here! I arrived this afternoon, went out

for a stroll, and missed my way back to my hotel. I am additionally glad to see you, for another and most important reason. I have made another pile ; I am going back to Paris, and I shall spend twenty thousand, if necessary, on the clearing up of the Eiffel mystery.'

A messenger entered and handed the friends a note ; Aramis opened it.

'From Athos,' said he. 'He writes : "I cannot return. Dine without me. I will meet you at Victoria, and go with you by the Paris mail. A great deal has been made clear."''

Mr. Perkins left, and the three friends, reunited, sat down to a private dinner. Much was asked about old friends ; then Porthos said :

'How did you vanish ? Ah, that was a *coup* well performed.'

'As simply as possible,' said Dunne. 'My friend, whom you may remember—he who offered to be surety for me at my trial—put me in a barrel.'

'With gimlet holes for air ?' said Porthos.

'No,' said Dunne ; 'that is a game I should not like to play ; it would be too dangerous. I have often heard of such a thing, but I don't think it has ever been done. Of what use are your gimlet holes, unless you expel the old air and bring in the new at a rate sufficient to sustain respiration ? No, no, my friend, I know a trick worth two of that. We die in a close atmosphere because our outward breath is made impure by quantities of carbonic

acid gas. Now, if we breathe out through caustic potash, all the carbon is removed, and the same air may be used hundreds, thousands of times, being purified each time. There is a very small amount of oxygen lost, or rather absorbed, by the system. This is replaced when necessary from a cylinder containing the gas many times compressed. This is the invention of a ship's officer, Mr. Fleuss, familiar to us for a long time.'

'How long could one live packed up with this apparatus?'

'A couple of days if necessary,' said Dunne. 'In a barrel, or under water, if that would suit you better.'

'A fellow-citizen, a friend of my friend's, had just come to Paris. He had made an immense pile, and was throwing money about most recklessly—just the usual little fling before settling down to steady Parisian life. He chartered a special train for Liège. I was rolled on board, crossed the frontier, and then, among the barrels, I was trundled into the gentleman's rooms, and no one the wiser. I was well packed in felt, so that there was no hollow sound. Shot made up the weight.'

'Well,' said Aramis, 'Brisure suggested many ways in which you might have escaped, but he never discovered that method.'

'It was not meant to be discovered,' said Dunne. 'I had to make my escape then, as time was to me a matter of very great value. I had to get to

America before my gang of workmen broke up. I reached them in time. I had dealt fairly by them for many years, and they behaved well to me and determined to stick on, good luck or bad luck, for a time. Good luck came; I am a rich man again, and I did not forget those who adhered to me in my temporary collapse.'

'But are you really thinking of going back to Paris?' said Aramis.

'Yes,' said Dunne; 'I have thought all that matter out, and I am certain that I have solved the Eiffel mystery.'

'And what is your solution?' said Aramis.

'Well,' said Dunne, 'the Prince must have been made away with by some one who was in the Café Rococo when the ascent was proposed, and who knew of the jewels. Again, the criminal must have been an old offender, who could lay a plan and get men to carry it out, all within a couple of hours.'

'Exactly Brisure's idea,' said Aramis. 'He says it was the waiter, Alphonse, whom he believes to be an old offender.'

'Alphonse—a known criminal is he?' said Dunne; 'then the question is settled.'

'And how about Sir Louis Ventnor?' said Aramis.

'He evidently has nothing to do with our case,' said Dunne. 'I fancy he is the proverbial red herring drawn across the detective's path. There may be any one of five hundred other reasons why he should wish to conceal his past.'

They put on their overcoats and paid the bill. A light wind had sprung up, which began to make the fog less dense. Aramis and Porthos called at their hotel and settled up, and Dunne accompanied them to Victoria. They had just got their luggage labelled when Athos, Brisure, and Hawke drove up. Athos, on seeing Dunne, shook hands with him most heartily, and said :

‘Come with us to Dover. There is much to be explained which concerns you. No luggage ? That is a mere bagatelle. Come back to-morrow. I will give you all you want for to-night.’

They all entered a compartment reserved for them by Hawke, and they bade him good-bye. Perkins came up and spoke to him as the train moved off.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DÉNOUEMENT.

ATHOS introduced Dunne to Brisure, who received him with much cordiality.

‘Ah, monsieur,’ said he, ‘we have a long tale to tell. Hawke was wrong ; I was wrong ; we were all wrong. Sir Louis Ventnor is——’

‘What ?’ said Aramis.

‘Sir Louis Ventnor is Prince Yussuff,’ said Brisure. ‘What put me on the track was a scene which had been described to me : the parting

between Prince Yussuff and his Indian servant at the Gare St. Lazare. I tried to find this man, and I sought him throughout London. There are not so many Asiatic servants in that city, but for a long while I failed in my search. At last I discovered him, not in London, but in Torquay. Prince Yussuff had given him enough money to set him up as a usurer in his native country. An old master of his, however, met him in London, and offered him such good terms to go to Torquay and make Indian curries during the sahib's year of furlough that the cook, whose name was Mhadhurah, consented to postpone the commencement of his financial career, and continue his *rôle* of Oriental chef for another season.

'While making acquaintance with Mhadhurah, I encountered his new master, a Mr. Jallerdyce. This gentleman knew scarcely anyone in Torquay. In an accidental encounter he took a fancy to me. We were staying in the same hotel, and we had several conversations over good cigars far into the night.

'He had nothing to do, and found it hard to get through the days. One of his methods of passing time was to read through the list of fashionable arrivals every morning.

'One day he came on the name of Sir Louis Ventnor, and wondered if he were the Louis Ventnor he had known in Munjerabad. Here was a piece of good fortune. I had already spent three days in this little place. In fact, I was taking a

holiday and studying England. I resolved to stay for at least one more casual conversation with the gentleman who had known Sir Louis Ventnor during his past career.

‘ Before we separated, I had learned a good deal about the Baronet. He had turned up in Munjerabad, no one knew from where, and he had taken to coffee-planting in this district, which contained a great many European planters.

‘ He was very much liked, and seems to have been a fascinating personality. He was in great request at reunions, as he played the piano beautifully. He possessed a perfect ear, and in consequence he became in a short time the best linguist among the planters. He learned the language of the high-caste natives, and also the lower-class patois. He made friends with the Hindoos, and was more intimate with, and knew more about them than planters who had been twenty years in the country.

‘ He had been all over the world—America, Australia, Africa. He was generally known as Captain Ventnor, and he claimed to be three times a captain—as a captain in the Suez Police, as a captain of a three-masted schooner trading between Newfoundland and New Orleans, and as a captain of Ceylon Pioneers. He was a crack polo player, and a good all-round athlete. With the natives he could do what he liked.

‘ A fancy-dress ball was given at Banglepore, the nearest large military station, and Mr. Jallerdyce

told me he was standing by when Ventnor came up in fancy dress. He was attired as a low-class native shopkeeper, and got up to look the character to perfection. 'As he came to the door of the ball-room and presented the regulation ticket, the peons and chuprassies in attendance stopped him, forced him out of the veranda, and loaded him with abuse, which Ventnor returned with a fluency and pungency of invective greater than their own. Such a ruction arose, that several of the committee went outside and were about to place Ventnor under restraint, when he proclaimed himself, to the abject terror of the peons who had opposed his admission.

'As I heard these words, I felt as if an idea had struck my head sharply, and inserted itself in my brain. Many things, formerly overlooked, now flashed on my memory. Prince Yussuff had never called at the British Embassy; there had been no intimacy between him and any other Oriental magnates. But then, on the other hand, he had been accepted by good society. Bah! but four days previously Hawke had been telling me of three princes received in the same year in London—one in Kensington, one in Bayswater, and one in Earl's Court, and none of them quite answered to the belief of their entertainers. I became convinced that I was now on the right track.

'Mrs. Tacker was present at the ball in Bangalore where Ventnor appeared as a native. She

was recovering from jungle fever, and unable to walk; she had been carried down in a chair to look on. She was the only one who in Prince Yussuff recognised Mr. Louis Ventnor.

‘Monsieur Ventnor continued coffee-planting for two years, and made some money; then the wandering fever seized him again, and he sold his little estate, and departed, none knew whither.

‘I next find him in Paris, the possessor of immense wealth. His suddenly acquired riches I could not explain, and I felt that this was the real mystery which now lay before me. Were it not for this, I had no further business with Sir Louis. That he should masquerade in Paris as an Indian prince was no business of mine. Having gone round my circle, I found myself at the same point at which I had started. What had become of the real prince? or, rather, what had become of Yussuff Khan, the true owner of the three millions of francs placed to his account in the *Crédit Lyonnais* by the Pondicherry branch of the Bank of France?

‘The affair was not yet by any means finished. We telegraphed to the bank in Pondicherry, and asked for a description of Yussuff. It tallied fairly well with the appearance of the man who had been in Paris.

‘Yussuff Khan had been the last of his family. His disappearance, therefore, did not create in India the excitement which one would have expected.

‘Then I began to think of Sir Louis’s present

attitude in England, and I remembered that he seemed to have had no disreputable hangers-on, until the appearance of a man named Raynsford. I felt that this person could supply the missing links. I sought out this man, and a great part of the remainder of my holiday was spent in cultivating his society.

‘I told him that I desired to make a fortune by buying horses in England and Ireland, and selling them in Paris, and that I wanted an Englishman to advise me, as knowing more about horses than we do in France. It was quite charming to see how readily Raynsford swallowed the bait. We visited horse-dealers’ places at Hendon, and made a trip into the country; we played a little at a low game of cards which he taught me. He bested me in every way, and delighted in displaying his superior acuteness. Every evening he drank freely at my expense, and used my generosity, while he despised my softness.

‘It was not difficult to get out of him all I wanted to know. He had been employed in the transport of horses from Australia to Madras, but had got the sack. He had made his way to Colombo, where he was thrown adrift until taken on by Yussuff as a groom. Monsieur Ventnor and Yussuff became friends during a journey to Bombay. They landed in Arabia at El Katif, above the Bahrein islands, and struck across Arabia by a caravan route by El Riad, Benda, and Hail. Here

they encountered a caravan of Persian pilgrims returning from Mecca, *viâ* Medina, and this band of devotees was infected by the plague, of which Yussuff died. Monsieur Ventnor continued his way and came to Suez. Here he left Raynsford in hospital, and went on to Paris, with Yussuff's passport, and Yussuff's three millions—not so bad a piece of business for Monsieur Ventnor. His danger ahead was Yussuff's old friend Gunnis Sing. Ventnor kept in constant communication with him, and said he was going to see him, so as to prevent the other, who was going through a health cure, from returning to Paris. All his letters were typed, so his handwriting did not betray him, and he wrote in Yussuff's style—of course educated natives communicate in English.

‘All was now clear, except the means by which this gentleman had conveyed himself from the summit of the Eiffel Tower.

‘Among the things that Mr. Jallerdyce told me about Ventnor was that, when hard up in Australia, he had exhibited for a time as a parachutist. This performance pays well ; it is very startling.

‘All was now clear,’ said Brisure. ‘I went to his favourite café, and I found out that his umbrella weighed three kilogrammes. It must have been a mass of steel rods.’

‘You may perhaps not be aware,’ said Athos to Hawke, ‘that sticks weighing two, or two and a half, kilogrammes have been lately all the fashion

in Paris. They have a steel core. They were started by some members of an athletic *cercle*. The Jockey Club then took to them, and they became more used on account of the many robberies with violence of winners going home from cards, so the weight of the umbrella was not noticed.'

'I got a telegram, stating that Madame Tacker, Estelle, and Stemming's widow had all called on Sir Louis on the same day. But I was then busy with our Alphonse. Ah! that was an exciting chase. It was only to-day that I could arrive in London.

'Monsieur Athos and I carried off Mademoiselle Estelle to a quiet dinner. Introduced by Monsieur Athos, I was regarded as an intimate friend.'

'At that time I knew nothing of all this,' said Athos. 'Had I known what I do now, I might have acted differently.'

'How did Estelle know anything new?' said Aramis.

'Well,' said Athos, 'Brisure, at dinner, began telling her and me that Sir Louis was the Prince. She had kept the secret so long that she was delighted to have her tongue loosed. She then described most graphically a scene in the tower, which she alone knew of. On the lift reaching the second platform in its descent, Estelle came out before anyone else. At that moment the Prince, with his parachute, alighted. He saw that Estelle perceived him. He pressed his fingers to his lips, and passed the fingers

of one hand round the wrist of the other. This her quick wit interpreted to mean that she should keep silent, and also that she should receive a bracelet on which she had set her heart. He then ran down the spiral stairs.'

'And yet she seemed the most surprised of any of us,' said Porthos.

'Ah, Estelle is a capital actress,' said Athos. 'Next day, the Prince came to see her. He only needed to wash off the brown dye, which had replaced Arabian sun-brown, to be disguised most effectually. He told her that he had to fly for his life, through politics, and that if she revealed her knowledge of his evasion he would be murdered by Nihilists. She promised to keep the secret, unless Monsieur Dunne were convicted.'

'I remember now,' said Porthos, 'she did not seem much distressed at the supposed murder of the Prince.'

'Aha!' said Brisure, as the storm rose, 'we shall have a bad crossing. That is the time for my enemy to enjoy his revenge.'

'But what about the death of the detective Stemming?' said Dunne.

'That is clear in every detail. It was done by Alphonse,' said Brisure. 'Alphonse Ribot is the son of a restaurant keeper of La Besace. He left France early in life. He is a monster, and has spent many years in a career of crime in Bulgaria, Suez, Callao, and Central America. But his course

is nearly ended. We have got back the jewels taken from Stemming, but Alphonse escaped over the tops of houses. Ha! the night gets worse. There will be a bad storm.'

The train began to pull up, and they came to the little station where tickets are collected before reaching Dover. The station-master came to the door.

'Is there any gentleman here named Monsieur Brisure?' said he.

'I am he,' said Brisure.

'A message for you, sir,' said he. 'It has just come over the company's wires.'

Brisure took the telegram, opened it, and read it through.

'Gentlemen,' said he, 'listen. This is from my subordinate :

"Alphonse Ribot was arrested at 8 p.m., in company with Madame Stemming. With frightful imprecations he denounced her as having betrayed him to the police. He broke loose from the officers who held him, and, although handcuffed, he contrived to extract a small derringer from his waistcoat pocket. He shot the woman dead, and shot himself. He may recover."

'He will recover,' said Brisure. 'They always do. We shall have his head.'

'I am sorry for that pretty little woman,' said

Hawke. 'She had twelve hundred pounds left by her husband. He came for that.'

They arrived at Dover, and went into the Grand Hotel. The inspector of police was waiting in the hotel parlour. Sir Louis had gone out in the storm, which was the worst known for years, and was so bad that the boat could not cross.

Hawke produced a search warrant, and ran upstairs to Sir Louis's room. A telegram lay in the fireplace, half burned. It was from Estelle. Enough could be deciphered to see that she had let Sir Louis know that she had told all. Hawke joined the others in the corridor.

'We must follow him at once,' said he. 'It is the very night for an escape or a suicide.'

'Not I,' said Athos. 'He did not kill my Prince, and I am not a police officer.'

Brisure ran off, followed by the inspector and by Porthos.

'The man who died in Arabia might have willed him the money,' said Athos. 'Porthos should not have gone.'

'Porthos trusted to instinct,' said Aramis. 'He's gone to aid, not to capture.'

'You are right,' said Athos. 'Let us follow in the same mind.'

They ran downstairs, and speedily caught up the others. The inspector learned the route of the pursued from successive policemen. Sir Louis, they were told, wore a waterproof cape.

It was a terrible storm. The thunder roared almost continuously—winter thunder, so unusual as almost to appal. They picked up two extra policemen, who joined in the pursuit. They went along the beach at a run. Then they saw Sir Louis. He stood stolidly gazing at the sea, his cape fluttering furiously.

‘Keep close to the cliff,’ said the inspector. There were shadows on it from place to place not lit by the lightning.

They were almost upon him, when a flame like that from a volcano shone three hundred feet above. The solid cliff leaned forward : it toppled, it fell, and two thousand tons’ weight of rock and débris fell and crushed the unfortunate Sir Louis Ventnor.

‘Quick ! Spades and shovels !’ said Porthos.

‘No use, monsieur,’ said Brisure. ‘One small stone from that height would kill a man. It is finished.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD.

‘CAN it possibly be you, Kitty?’ said Mrs. Bellairs, as she entered the drawing-room of the Grand Hotel.

‘You here ? I am so glad !’ said Mrs. Caldwyn.

‘We came in from Calais an hour ago,’ said Mrs. Bellairs, ‘and we have been putting on dry clothes. Such a night ! I was horribly frightened. I shall

never put my foot on another ship unless, before starting, the captain agrees to put back if it begins to blow badly. Here comes Halbert.'

'Hallo, Sidney!—I mean Bellairs,' said Caldwyn. 'I've just seen your name among the arrivals. This is a lucky meeting. We were about to go over, but the boat won't cross.'

'Much better being here, I assure you. People talk about tropical storms, but for pitching and for rolling, and as a new and original gymnastic impromptu contortionist, there is nothing to beat a boat in the Channel to-night.'

'We have been spending a fortnight in Paris,' said Mrs. Bellairs. 'And just fancy, Esmé Van Aglar is engaged to Lord Oudenarde! We are now going to settle at Halbert's ancestral hall, to chronicle small beer, etc. Fancy me as a squires, Kitty! I know one person who will laugh at me a good deal, and that is myself.'

'You will keep your house in town?'

'Oh, certainly; but we shall only go up for the season, except, of course, a fortnight now and then for variety.'

'Mrs. Bellairs, I declare! and why, yes, Mrs. Caldwyn! I am so delighted to see you!' said Mrs. Gup, as she swept into the room. 'What an awful night! and we are not to have supper for forty minutes. I call it a shame. Two shiploads thrown on the resources of the hotel. Some are gone on to London, but most got out, and had to stay and get

dried. And, my dears, did you hear about poor Lady Tacker ?'

'Nothing serious, I hope ?'

'Well, it is, rather. Her husband was not dead at all, only in the collapse stage of cholera, and his native servant got frightened and thought he was defunct, and sent the news. And,' continued she, 'now he is coming home to take divorce proceedings in consequence of what some mean, nasty, gossiping old woman told him. He never had the slightest suspicion of her flirtations all these years. Ah ! he was an excellent husband.'

'Awkward for her, that. But it may come all right.'

'Impossible,' said Mrs. Gup. 'He is not a man to be imposed on after his eyes have once been opened, but there's worse than that.'

'I am very sorry to hear so,' said Caldwyn.

'It now turns out that her supposed maiden aunt, from whom she inherited, had a son. She was married, when a schoolgirl, at Bordeaux to a scoundrel who soon afterwards was condemned to the galleys. The galleys, my dear ! What do you think of that for Lady Tacker's aunt's husband ? A son was born. The aunt's relatives hushed up the marriage, and the son was sent to Algiers. He now appears and claims his rights, and, as Claudine only inherited as next-of-kin, she now loses all. There was no will.'

'How sad !' said Mrs. Caldwyn.

‘You don’t know her properly,’ said Mrs. Gup, ‘I visited her, of course. In the whirl one must know everybody, but she was a most dangerous woman. Directly she knew anything about any-one, even her dearest friend, she immediately ran round and told everybody. Oh, she was such a gossip! Who is that in the corner? Mrs. Tiffin; no—yes, I declare it is. I have not told her yet;’ and away she trotted.

The manager of the hotel entered and advanced towards Mrs. Caldwyn, holding a packet of papers in his hands.

‘Sir Louis Ventnor,’ said he, ‘left this packet for Mrs. Caldwyn. Have you heard of his death?’

‘Sir Louis dead! How awful!’ said Kitty, taking it and handing it to her husband.

‘We are in the way,’ said Mr. Bellairs.

‘Well, Julia, I may have to ask your advice, and you will certainly tell your husband, so you may just as well hear all at once.’

The four were in a corner of the room far from the others. Caldwyn read the letter in a low voice :

‘DEAR MRS. CALDWYN,

‘I write to you to pray of you to think of me as mercifully as you can. Of Hawke, I beg that he will spare my name. When this paper comes to your hands I shall be no longer living. I write to explain my career, my ignominy, and my fate, and my innocence, for I am guiltless of the crime for

which I am pursued; but the chain of circumstantial evidence surrounds me, and the apparent proofs are so clear, strong, and convincing, that, though blameless, I can only escape the scaffold by a voluntary surrender of my existence.

‘I have never been able to make any important step in life by my own free will. Whenever I have passed through a serious crisis, I have been compelled to one particular course. I was the son of a weak younger son who worshipped a domineering elder brother, and the one all-absorbing faith in which I was brought up was a belief in the greatness of the family name, and a pride in the untarnished lustre of the family honour. Then a dreadful event occurred. One of us—we who ranked ourselves far above those with mushroom titles—after a mad fit of gambling on the turf, forged a brother officer’s name. I was not the guilty one, but I was made the scapegoat to shield the future head of the house. I was young, and I was cowed by my terrible old uncle. I was implored by my trembling father; I was told that the money was paid up—that a lapse (that was the word used), a lapse by a boy of eighteen would be soon condoned and forgotten; and that as soon as my cousin, the future head of the house and an officer in a crack corps, was safe, evidence would be produced which would clear my character, and I could return to England and all would be as if it had not been. Oudenarde knew of this, and he implored me not to

sacrifice myself; but I was in the grasp of a stronger will than my own. I left the country, and went to California, to await the day when I could return with a clear name. I had an allowance of three hundred a year, but, as every day of my life I expected the order to return, I could settle to nothing. I drifted to Egypt, to Australia, I drifted to India. There, for the first time, I tried settled work. I put together a little money, and then I thought I would try and see Paris. I got an order for the trifling sum I had on a French bank, and started, taking my passage only for Colombo, as I wished to spend a week in Ceylon.

‘At Colombo I met Yussuff Khan, and we speedily became great friends; he was a very fine fellow. Again I drifted. I went with him on a journey across Arabia. I had no particular object in going that way, but I went. Eighteen years of a shiftless, aimless existence had undermined my strength of will. Yussuff caught the plague. When dying, he begged of me to cash his letter of credit in Paris, and transmit the amount to a certain person in India, imploring me to inter him with all due rites, as he had a Mahomedan’s horror of being buried like a dog, and he desired me to take twenty thousand rupees for myself out of his money in Paris, to recompense me for my trouble, and as a remembrance of our friendship. I buried him with all due honour, and went on to Suez.

‘Here the old gambling fever broke out. None

knew Suez better than I did, as I had been three weeks in the Suez police, while waiting for a remittance. I knew that I was in a den of thieves, unsurpassed in the world, perhaps unequalled; but I had one grand flutter, and found myself with scarcely a sou of ready money.

‘That, however, did not trouble me. I had my own letter of credit on a French bank, and I could easily get an advance on it in Cairo. I sold a ring and took train for that city. I went to a bank there and explained my difficulty. The manager at once agreed to advance me forty pounds, to take me to Paris. He rang the bell; the cashier came in.

“‘Pay Mr. Ventnor,” said he, “forty pounds on his letter of credit, and notify to Paris.” He held out his hand. “Your passport,” said he, “as a mere matter of form.”

“‘I have no passport,” said I.

“‘Ah,” said he, “that is a great pity. Understand me well, Monsieur Ventnor; it is not for myself. As for me, I am perfectly satisfied; but you know that there are necessities of business. Go to the British Consul. He will give you a passport; or, without even taking that trouble, come here with anyone who knows you—that will be sufficient. I only too much regret even this short delay.”

‘I went to the Consul’s office. It was Easter holidays, and all public offices were closed, and he had left Cairo; so had all the other officials on whom I called. Here was I, with nearly a thousand pounds

of my own, and a hundred and twenty thousand pounds of Yussuff's in paper, and only twenty-seven shillings in coin, and I could not get any more. I walked the streets until I was weary, hoping to meet someone I knew. I went to all the rooms of the *tables d'hôte*. Not one known face could I see. I spent almost all my money in a good dinner, with an excellent bottle of wine. I then got the most expensive cigar I could get in Cairo, and sat down to think out the situation.

'I determined to go on to Alexandria. With all my wanderings and the thousands of people whom I had met, there could not be a second city without someone to recognise me. I had tried to make use of my having been in the Suez police, but at the time, some years before, when I had been there, men entered and left that force so rapidly as to leave no trace behind. To Alexandria I would go. If I failed there, it was a seaport town, and I would work my way to France before the mast. I sold my valise to get my railway fare. I was now without baggage, with nothing left but an umbrella. I was a loafer, and not for the first time either.

'I reached Alexandria at day-dawn. I again commenced a weary tramp, seeking for a face I could recognise. Not one was to be seen. All at once an idea occurred to me. Had Yussuff had a passport? All his papers were in his belt, which I had simply strapped on outside my own. I examined the packet, and there I found his passport, all *en règle*,

and signed by the Governor of Pondicherry, from which town he had started on his journey towards Europe.

‘This idea came through the sharpening of my wits caused by the pangs of hunger and by a tropical thirst. By this time the hour of business had arrived, and I found myself standing opposite a branch of the *Crédit Lyonnais* bank. I did not act of my own untrammelled free will. Hunger, thirst, and opportunity sent me into that bank. I began by presenting the passport. My tattered and travel-stained appearance meant nothing against me. They are used to that sort of thing over there. Only then it occurred to me that I could not raise cash on my own order by means of Yussuff’s passport. I presented his order. The manager was most obsequious.

“What shall I give you?” said he. “Five hundred?”

“Two,” said I.

‘I got the notes, and left.

‘The life I had been compelled to lead had so moulded my nature that the feeling of possessing so much ready cash caused me to feel a joyous rebound. I found myself in the *Place Mehemet Ali*. Across the square I saw the *Hôtel de l’Europe*. With speed I approached its welcome portals; I entered. The clerk, a Frenchman, asked about my luggage. I said I had none. He asked for my passport. Few English people have ever heard of such a request in

Egypt, because there every newcomer is an officer, or an official of some service, or a traveller, and these arrive in batches ; and they are men who can afford to travel and live without any obvious occupation, and are rich enough to arrive with servants and baggage.

‘It was that instant which changed my life. At the bank I had done no wrong ; I had but drawn a part of the money Yussuff had willed to me. But it now occurred to me that if I gave one name at the bank, and another at the hotel, I might find myself in a very awkward position. I again produced Yussuff’s passport.

‘That moment fixed my fate. Thenceforth I was Yussuff, and my own deliberate will had nothing to do with the transaction. I simply wanted to get into the hotel to have a bath, and get something to eat. No steamer started for two days ; the hotel was crowded, and I became an object of interest. I got a rig-out, and had a very pleasant time, and I took a passage by the ship *Peluse*, of the Messageries Maritimes line, for Marseilles.

‘I put my name on the ship’s books as Yussuff, as I could not safely take any other name in Alexandria. I picked up a khitmeghar and two men left adrift by a coffee-planter who had died in Alexandria. Nothing could be more pleasant than my journey to France. There were a good many Britons on board ; they were astonished at the fluency with which I spoke English. Why, you have only to turn into the Northbrooke Society to hear gentlemen of India

speaking better English than is often heard in the House of Commons. I wore the tarboosh at Alexandria, as everyone does; but I retained it at Marseilles, and in the train to Paris. As I sat at breakfast, Mr. Dunne addressed me as an Indian. I kept up the joke as a joke only. I went to the bank, and again handed in Yussuff's passport. I intended to explain all next day, but first I must see Paris. *Vogue la galère!*

'Then I met you. I lost my head. I dared to dream of linking your fate with my miserable career. I was mad! For that insanity I ask pardon.

'The time came when I felt that this farce could not continue, and I must acknowledge everything. When I drew ten thousand francs from the Crédit Lyonnais I had deposited a sealed packet containing nearly one thousand pounds of my own, and I deluded myself with the belief that I had taken no money not lawfully my property. I made more than sixty thousand pounds by gambling. I determined to tell my story to the *Figaro*, who would recount it as a huge joke. Yussuff's money lay practically intact; I would resume my proper position under an assumed English name, and continue to live in and enjoy Paris.

'One evening, as I was starting to meet Dunne, a letter was handed to me which I saw was from a friend who then lived in Clapham. I thrust it in my pocket unopened. I played with Dunne in his rooms. He left the room for fresh cards; I opened

the letter, and found enclosed an envelope addressed to me in my proper name. Inside this I found the announcement of the death of my cousin. I replaced it and continued playing. I was now a baronet. The room whirled round—the cards seemed as if hid by a mist. I lost heavily.

‘All my plans must now be changed; I could not declare my personation of Yussuff. I felt this as I thought with a cold shudder of the old stain on my youth. This latter by itself I might live down, but if Yussuff’s affair was superadded, I could not hope to live among honourable men.

‘Already I began to imagine myself among my old set, and breathing the traditions of old family associations. I now perceived that my long intercourse with blacklegs and gamblers had weakened my notions of honour, and that my personation was inexcusable. I felt that I must vanish from Paris to reappear in England. But this was not so easy. I thought of getting capsized in a boat, of a balloon lost at sea, but none of these were safe against discovery.

‘Then came the episode of the jewels. Here I saw at once a means of disposing of the wealth of Yussuff as he had desired. They have all gone to the person he mentioned, together with a copy of the redemption deed.

‘Then came the dinner in the Café Rococo. During one of my hard-up periods I had done a little parachuting, which is very simple; it only

requires nerve and activity. Looking at the Eiffel Tower, it occurred to me as strange that no one had ever dropped from its summit. Then Estelle insisted on going up at night. At once I saw a method of disappearance. Again this was not the result of any settled plan of my own. My propelling force was exoteric, not esoteric. During one of my moneyed intervals in Australia I had got made a neat mechanical instrument, to act as an umbrella or parachute; I thought it might be useful to use in escaping from a house on fire, also in the hands of a good fencer it was no mean weapon. I took it up with me and I got safely away, seen only by Estelle.

‘I began my new life in England. There was one danger. Would Estelle keep the secret? Then I discovered that the police were on my track, and I was told that Stemming had unravelled the Eiffel mystery. Judging him by his wife, I considered that he must be open to a bribe. I telegraphed to him to postpone action until he should have seen me, and I went to Paris to meet him.

‘I reached his rooms only to find that he had started a few minutes previously for England. I reached the railway platform in time to see him enter a carriage, and lock the door behind him. I gave five francs to the guard to wait until I got a ticket, and I got into a carriage next to the one occupied by Stemming.

‘On reaching the first stopping-place, I left my

own carriage, and entered Stemming's ; I found it empty. I considered that he had got out for a cup of coffee, and would return. I sat down, and prepared myself to offer him a fixed income for his silence.

‘The train moved on, and I travelled to Calais in the very carriage in which the man had been murdered. I was seen several times by the guard, who looked in, and I chanced to leave behind me a *silver cigarette-case, on which my crest was engraved.*

‘It was only on reaching London that I heard of the murder of Stemming, and remembered my cigarette-case. With that in the hands of the police, the chain of circumstantial evidence was complete. What chance had I? I had been seen at his rooms, and at the Gare du Nord, and in the carriage where the tragedy was enacted. I was disguised, of course ; but a man's height and figure cannot be disguised, and I had forgotten to change my voice. While acting as Yussuff, I had assumed a falsetto, more from the spirit of acting than from any other reason. In England I assumed the American accent, to make it seem I had never been in India. Then, again, I, as a foreigner, would be recognised by everyone who had heard me. I knew that I was doomed, though innocent ; I felt that I must fly or die.

‘But flight meant disgrace to the family honour. I contrived to meet my heir, though he did not know me. He is not a bad fellow, and he little

knew that he spent an evening with a man who was about to die to leave him an unstained inheritance. Still I delayed until some combination of circumstances should drive me to immediate action, as had always happened hitherto. I had not long to wait. During one day three women wanted to marry me, and two of them threatened me.

‘The game was up. My safety now depended on the reticence not of one woman, but of three. I saw it was time to prepare for my exit.

‘My object was to save the family honour, for which I had already suffered so much. There must be no inquest, no newspaper reminiscences, no police reports ; I must die and be buried simultaneously. I came to Dover ; I examined the cliffs ; I found near the top of one a deep fissure. In this I have placed dynamite with an electric fuse, from which I led a wire to the beach. At the final moment I shall stand beneath it with a pocket-battery, and inter myself, my misfortunes, and my faults. Brisure will drop his investigations. My former friends may pity me, if they cannot forgive. May you be happy.’

‘Poor fellow ! How sad it all is !’ said Mrs. Bellairs.

‘Come, come, Ju,’ said Bellairs ; ‘this will never do. You have turned quite pale. My dear, try this,’ said he, taking a bottle of smelling-salts from

his pocket, 'and take a drink of this pick-me-up,' producing a small flask. He was evidently a most devoted husband.

These four lived happy lives, but they would sometimes spare a moment's pity for Sir Louis Ventnor.

THE END.

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